the weekly
Standard

JUNE 7, 2010 $4.95

REMEMBERING THE UNDEAD
P.J. O'ROURKE

THE BIG SQUEEZE

Obama underfunds the military

THOMAS DONNELLY & GARY SCHMITT

DAN BLUMENTHAL

JOHN NOONAN

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WEEKEND *of* REMEMBRANCE
HONORING SERVICE *and* SACRIFICE

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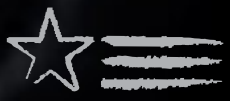
JOHN ELLSWORTH OF WIXOM, MICHIGAN, HOLDING A PORTRAIT OF HIS SON, MARINE LANCE CPL. JUSTIN M. ELLSWORTH, WHO DIED IN NOVEMBER, 2004, IN AL ANBAR PROVINCE, IRAQ.



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Does anyone read "how to" books to learn to walk, run, or ride a bicycle? Is anyone taught that it is by conforming to natural laws that one learns to perform those feats? No, of course not! *Whoever or whatever created natural laws* had to wait centuries on end for people to identify natural laws by studying the environment and nature's phenomena.

Richard W. Wetherill
1906-1989

There is a natural law of behavior that was not identified until the past century. It was identified by Richard W. Wetherill and requires ***mankind's behavior to be rational and honest***, according to natural law—not according to man-made law.

Wetherill spent decades trying to explain that the social, health, and economic woes of mankind were being caused by everybody's ignorance of nature's behavioral law: a law he called the law of absolute right.

His talks and writings were rejected by leaders of the educational, religious, and scientific communities, although one psychologist built a wide reputation on Wetherill's command phrase technique for releasing wrong, unconscious thoughts.

In general, people resent being told what they can and cannot think, say, and do. Their reason seems to be that it is "their business": a mistake made by those who overlook where the gift of life originates. ***Whoever or whatever is the creator*** arranged all the details, thereby enabling people to procreate.

Introduction to the ***law of absolute right*** and its influence on behavior is vital information desperately needed by every member of society.

Strange as it might seem, it could be said that the only choice people have is whether they will live in accord with the requirements of natural laws or die for ignoring them. People willingly adhere to the laws of physics, telling them what to think, say, and do. Scientific researchers eagerly seek to understand how natural laws function and the penalties for ignoring them. But to date, their failure to acknowledge nature's ***law of absolute right*** and its impact on human affairs is perpetuating countless human miseries.

The behavioral law is nature's way to create a community of survivors that having resolved their formerly unsolved problems and trouble are enjoying a new life. A common comment of those persons is, ***"It works."***

For example, one person reported that he had made friendly overtures to a long-time estranged, close relative and introduced him to the ***law of absolute right***. Later this person reported a phone call from his formerly estranged relative who said, "It works."

We invite readers to face all future situations with *sincere intent* to respond rationally and honestly, no matter what past reactions might have been. In that moment you will have yielded to yet another natural law created by ***whoever or whatever is the creator***, and you will discover that it works.

By conforming to the behavioral law, you join others who are already benefiting from adhering to it with rational and honest thoughts, words, and action.

Visit our colorful Website www.alphapub.com where essays and books describe the changes called for by whoever or whatever created nature's law of absolute right. The material can be read, downloaded, and/or printed free. Also press a button to listen to each Website page being read aloud with the exception of the texts of the seven books.

This public-service message is from a self-financed, nonprofit group of former students of the late Richard W. Wetherill. We are putting this information where it is available worldwide, and we invite your help to direct others to our Website so that they, too, can learn that conforming to this natural law creates a life that truly is well worth living.

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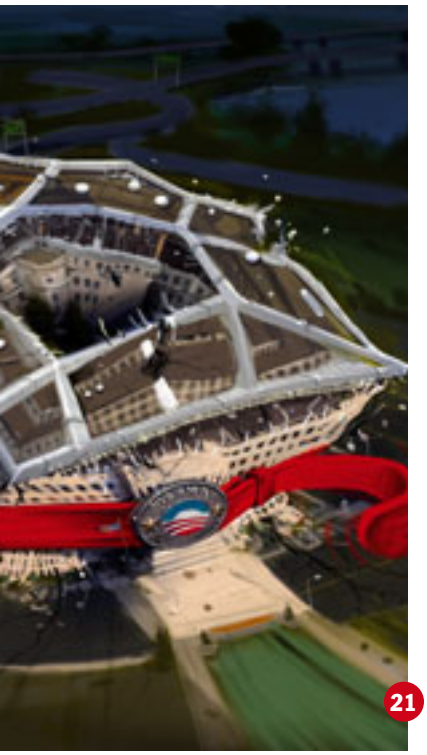

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The Not-So-Greasy Pole

America's most famous greasy pole is no more. When the plebes at the U.S. Naval Academy gathered on May 24 to mark the end of their grueling first year in Annapolis, they clambered up the 21-foot Herndon Monument almost without breaking a sweat, in two minutes and five seconds.

The annual ritual commonly took hours in the past, because upperclassmen slathered the monument with lard and hosed down the ground at its base as well as the plebes. But the wussification of America proceeds apace, and the service academies are not spared. This year the order came down: no lard, no hoses. According to an academy spokesman, Vice Admiral Jeffrey Fowler, the superintendent "made the decision this year that it would be safer for the midshipmen to climb the monument without grease."

The Scrapbook thinks we can all agree that he's right about that. But do we really want our academy superintendents to conceive of themselves as playground monitors? Picture a member of the class of 2013 opening the 1983 novel *A Country Such As This* by Senator James Webb, former secretary of the Navy and 1968 Annapolis grad, and reading this passage:

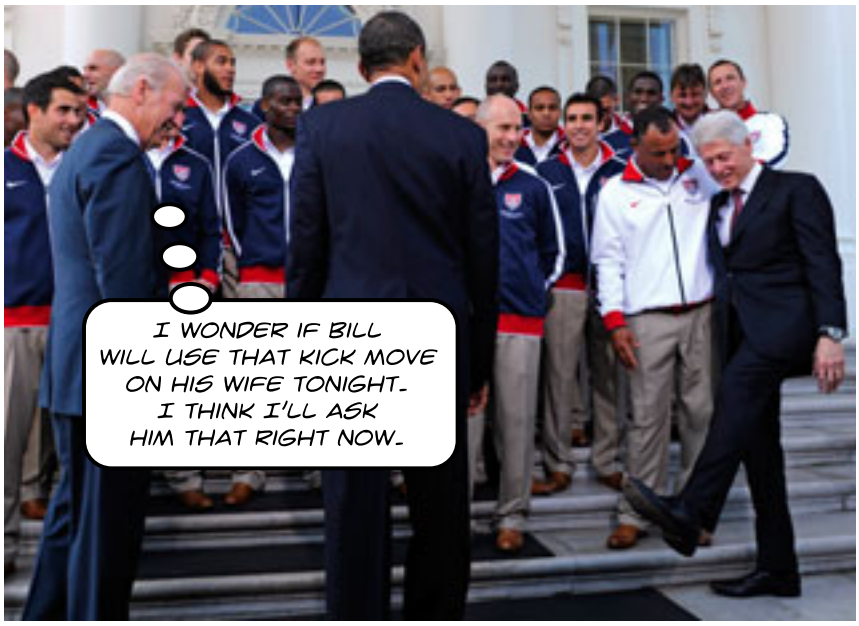
The plebes of 2004

> In the center of the crowd, as if on stage, a thousand plebes surrounded the Herndon Monument, a twenty-foot phallus erected in honor of a ship once lost at sea. The monument and the small field around its base was slick with grease. Bags of grease dangled from its top, ready to pop when touched. The plebes in the grass were shin-deep in it, falling and laughing, covered with the ooze.
>
> They were trying to build a human wall, in order to place a midshipman cap on top of the monument. Once they were able to do so, completing a ritual that dated back to Nimitz's and Halsey's midshipmen days, plebe year with all its deprivations and humiliation would be over. They had been trying for more than an hour. Somewhere at the base of the monument, thick-legged and broad-backed J.J. Lesczynski was providing a platform for that human wall. . . . The plebes were four layers high, now, a gluey ring around Herndon. A small midshipman was hiked up to the second layer, and crawled among his classmates as if they were boulders. . . . The crowd began to yell, a crescendo. . . . and the thousand plebes raised fists into the air, clasping friends and dancing in the muck around Herndon. Their joy was real.

Do you imagine that this young midshipman will be grateful to the superintendent for sparing him this ritual in the name of safety? Will he pity the likes of Nimitz and Halsey, who lived in less enlightened times? Asked and answered.

Now that the pole has been degreased, The Scrapbook wonders how long the cover toss will last—that moment at the conclusion of the graduation ceremony when midshipmen fling their caps into the air. After all, there are children present, scrambling to grab one of the covers as a souvenir. They might trip and fall in the melee. Better safe than sorry, right? ♦

What They Were Thinking



AP PHOTO / SUSAN WALSH

The U.S. World Cup soccer team, with President Obama, Joe Biden, and Bill Clinton, May 27

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Self-Pity in the Oval

At a fundraiser for Senator Barbara Boxer in California last week, President Obama, according to the report from the press pool, "began with his usual speech . . . walking the crowd through the economic situation that greeted him his first day in office and the initiatives Democrats have passed since—stimulus bill, extending unemployment benefits and COBRA, health care," etc.

Then he uncorked a Jeroboam of bombast and self-justification: "Let's face it," he said, "this has been the toughest year and a half since any year and a half since the 1930s." Really? As Daniel Halper commented at weeklystandard.com, "One does hope it's been the toughest year and a half *he's* ever had. He is the president, and it's a job that requires a bit of work." But it's astonishingly unseemly, not to mention historically illiterate, for Obama to elevate the difficulties he's faced above those confronted by—well, by FDR, Truman, Eisenhower, JFK, LBJ, and Nixon, just for starters.

Any one-month period from 1941 to 1945 was probably a bit tougher for the chief executive than the last 18 months combined. There was a hot war in Korea when Eisenhower took office, with over 300,000 U.S. soldiers deployed there. The Cold War was at its peak when JFK took over—the Berlin Wall went up in August 1961. Was 1969-70 a walk in the park for Nixon? How about 1979-80 for Jimmy Carter. More recently, there was the late unpleasantness of 9/11 that landed in George W. Bush's inbox during his first year in office.

In terms of the domestic political balance of power, Obama took office with a stiff breeze filling his mainsail: just shy of an 80-seat majority for his party in the House of Representatives and with a filibuster-proof 60 senators.

Some brave adviser needs to whisper some simple advice in the president's ear: Man up, sir.

If one wants to play the game "Compare and Contrast the Respective Performances of our Chief Executives Since the 1930s," The Scrapbook is prepared to argue that we have seen more self-pity in the Oval Office over the last year and a half than in any year and a half since the late 1970s. ♦

Texas Textbooks Update

Texas has been much in the news as it adopts new textbook standards reflecting a more conservative approach to numerous issues in American history. These include such ideologically freighted issues as the role of Christian belief in the founding of the American republic, the nature of the capitalist system in contrast with the failure of socialism, and the doctrine known as "American exceptionalism."

If we may be immodest, one area of concern that has been neglected except in these pages ("What Johnny Needs to Learn About Islam," Stephen Schwartz, December 7, 2009) are the new standards for teaching about Islam, which ended up surprisingly good.

The final draft of the standards was released by the Texas Education Agency on April 15, for public comment before a final vote by the Texas State Board of Education. The second draft of the Texas standards clarified the relationship of Islamic fundamentalism and Palestinian terrorism, as Schwartz had recommended in his

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article last December. The final version reads as follows:

> §113.42, World History Studies, (14), "History. The student understands the development of radical Islamic fundamentalism and the subsequent use of terrorism by some of its adherents. The student is expected to:
> (A) summarize the development and impact of radical Islamic fundamentalism on events in the second half of the 20th century, including Palestinian terrorism and the growth of al Qaeda;
> (B) explain the U.S. response to terrorism from September 11, 2001, to the present."

In his capacity as executive director of the Center for Islamic Pluralism, Schwartz attended the public hearing in Texas and testified in support of the proposed changes in standards, on May 19. We're happy to report that the Texas State Board of Education voted to adopt the new standards two days later. ♦

Can This Marriage Be Saved?

A correction published in the May 27 *Washington Post*:

> A May 23 Style article about wedding registries mixed up the opinions of Martha Ertman and Karen Lash, a married couple who discussed their 2008 engagement. Ertman was in favor of having a registry, and she, not Lash, said, "You get a ring with a diamond, and you register; that's how you know you're doing it." It was Lash, not Ertman, who said, "It seemed greedy." ♦

Sentences We Didn't Finish

'The Roman Catholic hierarchy is entitled to its views. But the episode reinforces perceptions of church leaders as rigid, dogmatic, out of touch . . . " (Nicholas D. Kristof, *New York Times*, May 27). ♦

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Nothing to Sneeze At

Oh, sure, there's enough particulate matter in the New York City air to turn a white shirt gray by the end of the workday. And a couple whiffs of a narrow West Side cross street tightly enclosed by high-rises on a hot summer day when the trash is overdue for pickup could put even the strongest stomach to the test.

Nevertheless, blessed be the New York air: When I moved there after college, my longtime seasonal allergies were gone within a month. At the time, I thought I had at last outgrown them—a breakthrough for someone who'd been taking allergy pills since he was a, well, snot-nosed kid.

Only when I moved to Washington a few years later and the runny nose, watery eyes, dry cough, and headache returned did the truth become clear. I get it, thought I. It's not that I outgrew my allergies. It's that Manhattan doesn't have plants.

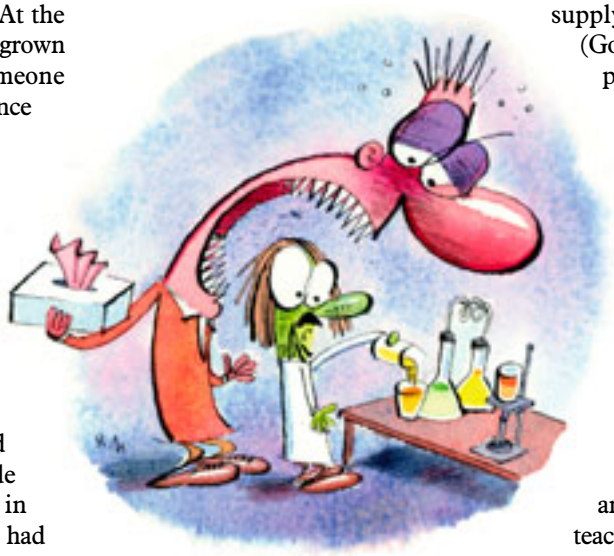
I suppose I could have worked myself into at least a low-grade wheeze if I'd spent more time in Central Park. But the last thing I had moved to New York to do was go to Central Park. I had no use for a green island of tranquility. I was trying to escape tranquility.

There's no avoiding the greenery in Washington. The nation's capital is a garden city, and the winds diffuse the pollen through even the most citified neighborhoods. So it was back to the allergy pills.

Eventually, my medication of choice went over-the-counter, news of which I welcomed joyfully—until I realized that it was actually going to cost me more, since my health insurance would no longer be paying for any of it. At least there was the convenience of not having to go through the pharmacist.

What a success the over-the-counter move was. More allergy sufferers had more access to more relief than ever before. The product was moving off the shelves so fast it seemed the manufacturers could barely keep pace with demand. I was hardly alone in seeking and finding relief.

Unfortunately, it was apparently not relief from allergies that many of the purchasers of my brand of pill were seeking. Claritin-D's distinctive ingredient is pseudoephedrine sulfate. "Pseudo," as it is known in certain subcultures, is a precursor to methamphetamine. Many of the pills flying off the shelves were going to illicit labs, where they were getting cooked into crystal meth.



HAL MAYFORTH

Drugstores would find themselves beset by wild-eyed crankheads with rotting teeth seeking to buy pills in quantity. Or they'd shoplift them. Or break in after-hours to strip the shelves bare for transfer in bulk to the local basement lab.

Eventually, the government figured this out. Although still over-the-counter in the precise sense that you don't need a prescription (and your insurance company isn't paying a nickel), pseudoephedrine products moved back to the pharmacy. To buy them, you have to produce an ID and register your purchase either in a paper logbook or electronically, depending on the tech savvy of the drugstore. The government also strictly regulates the amount you can buy, 3.6 grams for a 15-day supply. The electronic record-keeping will tell the pharmacist to turn you away if you try to exceed your quota.

As it happens, I have a kid who takes the same allergy pill I do. But she's under 18, so she can't buy it. Which means, in effect, that I buy my supply, and my wife buys my kid's. (Good thing the missus uses a non-pseudo based allergy pill herself, otherwise we'd be, ah, cooked.) But this procurement regimen requires precise calibration: If you miss by a day, you're out of pills, and you can't catch up. Of course in high allergy season, the drugstores run out. Too bad. You can't stock up in advance.

Thus began my life on the gray side of the law. No, it's not quite "Breaking Bad," the AMC black comedy about an uptight high school chemistry teacher who learns he has cancer and starts cooking meth in order to leave a nest egg for his family. But still.

Those electronic logs? They're regional. If you're traveling out of town, buy up. Those paper logs at the family pharmacies? Nobody checks them against electronic logs. So if CVS turns you down because 15 days haven't elapsed since your last score, go someplace with paper record-keeping.

That's all I'm willing to share today. But if you're running the local meth lab, let me just tell you this: Be careful. A fed-up, bleary-eyed hay fever sufferer may be on his way to your lab to steal your meth and turn it back into Claritin-D.

Tod Lindberg

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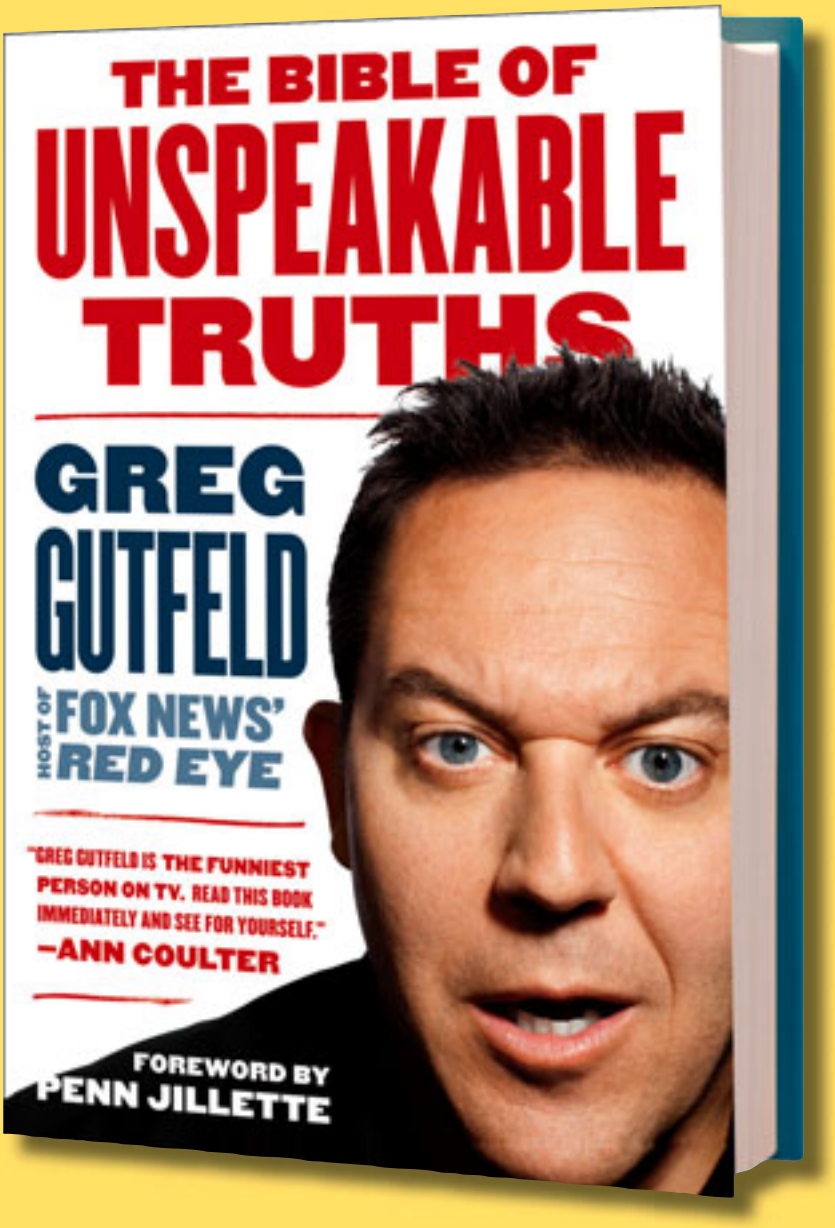
THE UNVARNISHED TRUTH... STRAIGHT FROM THE GUT



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the weekly Standard

Keep America Safe

Two weeks ago President Obama fired his top intelligence adviser—or at least the man who held the title.

In the six months before Dennis Blair was relieved of his duties as director of national intelligence, there were three attacks on U.S. soil, each one with troubling details. After Fort Hood, we learned that the FBI knew before the attack about email correspondence between the shooter, Major Nidal Malik Hasan, and al Qaeda cleric Anwar al Awlaki and did nothing. We know that the Christmas Day bomber, Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, stopped talking to his interrogators after he was read his Miranda rights and that, moreover, the interrogation was conducted without the benefit of the dossier the CIA had compiled on Abdulmutallab. And the would-be Times Square bomber, Faisal Shahzad, almost escaped after leaks about his identity appeared in the press. There is much more.

We were told by the administration that the system worked when it had not. We were told that the attackers had no connections to the international jihadist networks when they had many. We were told the high-value interrogation group was operational, and it wasn't. We were told that 50 minutes was enough to learn everything knowable about a would-be attacker and his al Qaeda connections, a claim that was quickly discarded when he resumed cooperating and the administration wanted to let us know how much additional intelligence he was providing.

So someone had to go. Eric Holder and Janet Napolitano would have been better choices than Blair. But the decision to fire him suggests that the Obama administration has finally recognized that things had to change.

There have been other indications, too. After initially downplaying Faisal Shahzad's ties to international terrorism, the administration swiftly and decisively corrected itself. Three months after arguing in a letter to Congress that the U.S. government had no choice but to quickly mirandize detained terrorists, Holder said that the administration would work with lawmakers to give interrogators more flexibility in their efforts to obtain intelligence.

These are good signs. But Obama needs to go further.

His first step is to end the investigation of CIA interrogators by the Justice Department. The repercussions have been severe. CIA operators, already risk averse, are today far less willing to take risks in the field out of fear that a wrong decision, even a legal one that produced crucial intelligence, could send them to jail. Obama should also insist that the Justice Department aggressively investigate the alleged exposure of CIA officials by lawyers representing Guantánamo detainees. Photographs of officials were discovered in the cell of Mustafa Ahmed al Hawsawi and were reportedly provided by investigators working for the ACLU and the National Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers. John Rizzo, former CIA general counsel and a 30-year intelligence veteran, said that the breach was far graver than the leak of Valerie Plame's name.

Another crucial step: Move the day-to-day direction of intelligence policy out of the West Wing. President Obama wanted to nominate John Brennan to run the CIA, but the left protested, pointing to Brennan's high-ranking positions at the agency during the Bush administration. But as White House "intelligence czar," Brennan occupies a position of far more influence—proximity to the president is power. Brennan works for the administration; he is not an independent voice on intelligence matters. He has repeatedly shown himself willing to make political arguments in defense of the White House. It was a problem that Blair noted in congressional testimony after the Christmas Day attack. "The political dimension of what ought to me to be a national security issue has been quite high. I don't think it has been particularly good, I will tell you, from the inside, in terms of us trying to get the right job done to protect the United States."

Nothing is more important, however, than a rethinking of interrogation policy. Obama ran on a promise to end "torture." Most everyone understood him to mean "waterboarding," but Obama has gone much further. By restricting interrogators to the techniques in the Army Field Manual he has chosen to take away valuable interrogation techniques—enhanced means that do not constitute "torture" and that have proven effective. Furthermore most of the interrogations of high-value terrorists captured overseas have been outsourced to liaison services. We are choosing to know less about our enemies.

Finally, the president needs to provide the intelligence community with a clear mission. We are at war. We are fighting the adherents of radical Islam—non-state terrorist groups and the states that support them. This is the central fact of this war, and the president should not be shy about saying so.

While these steps don't go far enough, they would, without question, make us safer.

—Stephen F. Hayes

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A Culture War Deferred

The Dutch elections—much to the candidates' surprise—are more about money than Muslims.

BY CHRISTOPHER CALDWELL

GARY LOCKE

Amsterdam

With his career riding on his performance in last Wednesday's nationally televised debate, Dutch prime minister Jan Peter Balkenende was grilled by the young journalist Mariëlle Tweebeeke. She had on a fetching black silk camisole and white jacket and was asking which three of the dozen or so parties running in the national election to be held on June 9 were best able to confront the European economic crisis—in short, whom he'd be willing to form a coalition with.

It was an important question. Balkenende's Christian Democrats are the party of electoral ballast in the Netherlands. They don't have a lot of ideas themselves, but they do speak for "Middle Holland." What kind of government the Netherlands gets often depends on whether the Christian Democrats smile on the social democrats of the PvdA or the free-marketers in the VVD. Balkenende's ability to form a coalition with either of them has kept him prime minister for the past eight years. Naturally, he was not going to answer Tweebeeke's question. So when she pressed him, he just looked down and muttered, as if against his will: "*U kijkt zo lief*." (Roughly: "You look so sweet!")

The groan that went up from the crowd sums up Balkenende's predicament: He is embarrassing the public he is supposed to rule. First elected in the 2002 race that saw the murder of populist Pim Fortuyn, he has presided over four different governments that stood, in their different ways, for not much in particular. Last winter it became apparent that his PvdA coalition partners were growing restive when several members of parliament began calling for an investigation of the Netherlands' participation in the Iraq war, one of Balkenende's first actions. Then, in February, the PvdA refused to go along with his desire to keep Dutch troops in Afghanistan, and his government collapsed.

And with that, it seemed, politics-as-usual would collapse, too. The anti-Muslim firebrand Geert Wilders, a big, boisterous, bizarre-looking man with a pompadour of peroxide-blond hair, had been the most popular politician in the country for several months in the winter. It appeared that his Party of Freedom (PVV) might get to lead the next government. The PvdA then appointed as its lead candidate the former Amsterdam mayor Job Cohen, credited with having held the city together in the days after the filmmaker Theo van Gogh was assassinated on its streets in 2004. The stage was set for a contest between Mister Clash-of-Civilizations on one hand and Mister Can't-We-All-Get-Along on the other. But it hasn't turned out that way.

Since 1994, 90 percent of Dutch respondents have told pollsters they want an aggressive assimilation policy. Problems with multiculturalism have driven the country into an almost per-

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manent state of vigilance and soul-searching, especially after the murders of Fortuyn and van Gogh. In 2007, the Dutch princess Máxima, born in Argentina, claimed that she had tried to find out about Dutch identity but "didn't find one."

Wilders, who has lived in hiding since the van Gogh killing, begs to differ. He proclaims Dutch identity with a vengeance. He speaks of the concerns of "Henk and Ingrid," a typical couple whom he claims he uses as a focus group, a sort of Dutch equivalent of Joe the Plumber. He has attacked two former cabinet members for holding dual citizenship. He would stop immigration from Muslim countries and ban minarets and the Koran, which he describes as not a holy book but a war manual, along the lines of *Mein Kampf*. He made an Internet film called *Fitna* that urged Muslims to rip out of the Koran the pages that Western liberals found offensive. He claimed the PvdA had its headquarters in Mecca. He described Turkish prime minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan as a "total freak." Last fall, he called for a *kopvoddentaks*, a shockingly rude term for a tax on headscarves that might best be translated as "rag-head levy." Surveys by the country's leading pollster, Maurice De Hond, showed him taking 32 seats in the 150-seat chamber. But the intervening months have not been kind to him. How come?

One PvdA politician who is surprisingly sympathetic to Wilders's concerns had a partial explanation. "Intellectuals like the Islam debate," he said. "The problem is that Wilders, for all his claim to represent the ordinary working man, is too essentialist, too intellectual, about Islam. He keeps talking about what the Koran says. People don't care about that. This issue is about what white Dutch people complain about with other parents when they're dropping off their kids at birthday parties. It's about crime. It's about Moroccan kids mugging old people and shouting at girls."

Alexander Pechtold—who leads the D66 party, a sort of John Lindsay-ite tendency named after the year it was founded—emerged as Wilders's leading antagonist at the time of his steep rise last fall. "Le Pen, Haider, Dewinter … " Pechtold said in his office in mid-May. "Wilders's is roughly the same kind of movement." But one should mark a key difference. Unlike those parties, the PVV has no descent from, or connection to, the World War II-era fascist parties and repudiates pretty much all of their ideological commitments, starting with anti-Semitism and racism. Wilders worked on a farm in Israel as a young man, and the PVV member of parliament Martin Bosma, a top party strategist, describes the party's support for Israel, where Wilders still travels often, as absolute ("It is a frontline state of jihad," he says). Bosma keeps a picture of the Lubavitcher rebbe in his office alongside a large poster of Ronald Reagan.

Wilders, who is not a religious man, is equally committed to the sexual liberties established under Dutch law over the past decades. One of the disorienting things about *Fitna*, his anti-Islamist movie, is that the last third of it is given over to a plea for gay rights. Readers of the Dutch gay newspaper *Gaykrant* picked his party as their second favorite in a poll last year.

In March, the PVV ran in two local elections. It came a close second in the Hague, the country's crime-plagued administrative capital, and won big in Almere. Almere is a strange city. Half an hour from Amsterdam, it sits on land that was "poldered" out of the IJsselmeer over the past five decades and is heavily populated by people who have fled the newly multicultural metropolis for a fresh start. Much as certain working class neighborhoods in Long Island replicated, in a rustic setting, streets in Manhattan or Brooklyn, Almere is a place where you can hear Amsterdam accents that are no longer audible in Amsterdam. Almere really went for Wilders. But, once elected, the PVV quit coalition talks after half an hour, choosing opposition over government. This made it look like a protest party that would never be willing to rule.

And that became a bigger and bigger problem as the economic woes of the European Union began to eclipse all others. The Netherlands, relatively speaking, is in excellent economic shape, with unemployment at 5 or 6 percent, a trade surplus, and budget deficits that are a fraction of those in the United States. But like its neighbor Germany, the country is most unwilling to see its frugality used to underwrite Greek people's retirements and obsessed with keeping its own fiscal house in order.

All parties traditionally submit their budget plans for preelection scoring to the Central Planning Bureau—a sort of Congressional Budget Office. At present there is a $39 billion structural deficit. Although the parties differ on how quickly it can be eliminated, there is broad consensus about what must be done: First, the country's mortgage-interest tax deduction must be reformed or eliminated. Second, the country's unimpressive and actuarially out-of-control national health service must either be reined in or get a big new infusion of state funding. Third, retirement ages need to rise, possibly to 67. The Wilders party will have none of it. It holds that the cost of welfare for immigrants is so high that curbing immigration and repatriating those improperly in the country will suffice to put the budget back into balance. The focus on the economy has damaged Wilders.

Perhaps more surprisingly, it has damaged the PvdA's Job Cohen just as much. In early March, with the whole of the party leadership assuming the election would be fought over immigration and cultural issues, Cohen was chosen to replace Wouter Bos, one of the European politicians most knowledgeable about economics. Finance minister in late 2008, he was praised across the political spectrum for the way he handled the financial crisis.

Cohen, the thinking went, was a new man for a new time. He would be the Barack Obama of the Dutch election, an inspiring orator and subtle thinker who could put together a coalition of people who had not realized they were compatible, much as he had done after the van Gogh killing. "He's not somebody who's outspoken on very delicate issues," said Ed van

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Thijn, another former Amsterdam mayor, a couple of weeks ago. "That's his strength." This is not to say that Cohen is naïve or mushy-minded: As state secretary for justice a decade ago, he passed the toughest Dutch immigration reform to date.

But no sooner had Cohen replaced Bos than the situation in Greece became critical. Wilders's issues were taken off the table and Cohen's discomfort with economic issues was made manifest. In three debates over the past ten days, he has struggled on questions of how the country's medical-insurance system works, on how pensions are funded, and even on what the details of his party's platform are. His larger problem is that, since Dutch mayors are appointed, not elected, he finds himself in a big electoral campaign for the first time. People still like Cohen a great deal, and he may indeed be a Barack Obama in the privacy of his office, but it is clear he is not one on the stump.

The beneficiary of this impasse is Mark Rutte of the free-market VVD party. An excellent debater with a real command of monetary policy and a willingness to call for a hard-line immigration policy, he is winning back voters not only from D-66 but also from the Wilders party. This leaves one member of the PVV fuming that the VVD's immigration policy is "an exact copy of us." The VVD, that is, would impose Wilders's immigration policies, but without the unseemly appearance of enjoying it too much.

The drawback is that it is hard to see what coalition could be formed around the VVD. A "purple" coalition with the PvdA is one possibility. Another is the "Danish model" (Rutte visited Denmark two months ago) in which a minority government of free-marketers and Christian Democrats could count on the votes of the PVV, so long as it legislates aggressively on immigration and multiculturalism.

There is one aspect of the Dutch multiparty system, though, that is likely to endure under any conceivable circumstance. "Elections lead to a government no one wants," says the pollster De Hond, "even if you're a member of the party in power." ♦

Not Dead Yet

Introducing the pre-obituary: a few choice words before you go. BY P.J. O'ROURKE

I have an idea for a brand new type of newspaper feature. And gosh do newspapers need one. No industry in living memory has collapsed faster than daily print journalism. You can still buy a buggy whip, which is more than can be said for a copy of the *Rocky Mountain News*, *Cincinnati Post*, or *Seattle Post-Intelligencer.* One would think that a business in such dire condition would be—for desperation's sake—wildly innovative. But newspapers exhibit a fossilization of form and content that's been preserved in sedimentary rock since the early 1970s when the "Women's Pages" were converted to the "Leisure Section." General Motors itself showed more inventive originality on its way to Chapter 11, as the two people who bought Pontiac Azteks can attest.

Readers are fleeing newspapers. What are newspapers offering to lure them back? Out-of-register color photographs have replaced blurry black and white pics. More working women and black people appear in comic strips. (Although comparisons to Walt Kelly's "Pogo" and Al Capp's "L'il Abner" show, if anything, a decline in the social relevance of the funny pages, "Marmaduke" always excepted.) Various versions of "Dr. Gridlock" have been instituted so that when you get to work and open your morning paper you can see why you didn't get to work. That avant-garde broadsheet the *New York Times* supplemented its dull "Corrections" with a "Public Editor" who combines pomposity with groveling as only a *New York Times* editor can. And, in "Styles of the Times," *Miss Lonelyhearts* and *The Day of the Locust* have been crossbred with Anna Wintour to produce something for famously overdressed people with scary romantic entanglements that's known in the trade as the Gay Sports Pages. Then there's Sudoku. (Tip for silencing airplane seatmates: Take out a Friday Sudoku and rapidly fill every box in ink—it's not like they'll check if your numbers are right.)

One bright idea isn't going to solve the problems of the American newspaper industry, but it's one bright idea more than the American newspaper industry has had in 40 years. What I propose is "Pre-Obituaries"—official notices that certain people aren't dead yet accompanied by brief summaries of their lives indicating why we wish they were.

The main advantage of the Pre-Obit over the traditional obituary is the knowledge of reader and writer alike that the as-good-as-dead people are still around to have their feelings hurt. It was a travesty of literary justice that we waited until J.D. Salinger finally hit the delete key at 91 before admitting that *Catcher in the Rye* stinks. The book's only virtue is that it captures, with annoying accuracy, the maunderings of a twerp. The book's only pleasure is in slamming the cover shut—simpler than slamming the door shut on a real Holden Caulfield, if less satisfying. The rest of Salinger's published oeuvre was precious or boring or both. But we felt constrained to delay saying so, perhaps because of an outdated Victorian hope for a death-bed flash of genius.

Let us wait no more. With the Pre-Obituary we can abandon pusillanimous constraint and false hope and say what we think about the lives of public nuisances when their lives are not yet a dead letter. And we won't be stuck in the treacle of nostalgia and sentiment. We won't find ourselves

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saying of some oaf, "His like will not pass this way again." Or, if we do say it, we can comfortably add, "Thank God!" The precept of Diogenes isn't "Do not speak ill of the living."

Think of the opportunities we've missed already. Bea Arthur (1922-2009) performed a grievous disservice to popular culture by uniting two equally dreadful but previously discrete American types. In her portrayal of loud, Bolshie Maude, Arthur taught every angry feminist to be a common scold and every termagant housewife to be Emma Goldman. Once Arthur had become respectable by dying no one had the nerve to title her funeral notice "The Taming of the Shrew."

Paul Newman (1925-2008) was not, in and of himself, a bad person. But he deserved to be damned to his face for lending charm to the smirk of liberalism. And after he'd become an immortal only a heartless writer would have pointed out that for an entire generation of young people, Paul Newman is, mainly, a salad dressing.

John Kenneth Galbraith (1908-2006) was, in and of himself, a bad person. He taught economics at Harvard, served in FDR's Office of Price Administration, was chairman of Americans for Democratic Action, and, after 97 years of comfort and achievement in a free market society, still believed that a free market society is wrong. Maybe it is, if it provides comfort and achievement to John Kenneth Galbraiths. There's a special stove-top perch in the kitchen corner of hell for witty, urbane, prosperous, and celebrated leftists. It would have been nice to tell John about it before he took his seat.

And then there's that missed opportunity of all opportunities, Ted Kennedy (1932-2009). One Pre-Obituary hardly would have done the job. Teddy left us with 50 years of unperformed dances upon his future grave. There was the death of his self-respect in 1962 when he was given his brother's Senate seat the way a child is given a toy to keep him occupied on a long trip. There was the death of his conscience in 1969 when he killed Mary Jo Kopechne. There was the death of his political fortunes in 1980 when he couldn't wrestle the presidential nomination from even Jimmy Carter. And there was the long, slow death of what little sense he had as he became the Grand Old Moron of the Senate.

We mustn't let these passings pass us by again. There are all sorts of knaves and fools ready to be put to bed with a shovel. Why should they sit at their ease in God's waiting room reading old issues of the *Nation*?

Jimmy Carter is 85. We must hasten to throw the Camp David Accord in his face before he heads to his eternal camp-out with Anwar el-Sadat. Gore Vidal is 84. There's no chance he'll end up in the same place as Bill Buckley. We ought to take up Buckley's gauntlet and slap Gore's face here and now. Noam Chomsky is 81. Why should Satan have all the fun? We own pitchforks of fact aplenty with which to prod his living flesh. Norman Lear is 87 and will be married to Maude forever any minute now. (Although Lear may find himself forgiven. He never meant to make Archie Bunker a hero and a role model, but perhaps the road to heaven is paved with bad intentions.) Ed Asner is 80. Put him together with Ben Bradlee (88) and Alan J. Pakula, director of *All the President's Men* (died in 1998, darn it), and you have the villains in the tragic tale of the American newspaper's self-congratulatory ossification. Ross Perot also will be 80 soon. We owe him one Bill Clinton-sized philippic. Ralph Nader is 76. High time that someone, metaphorically, flipped him in a Corvair. And Paul Ehrlich is 78. In these days of the graying workforce, baby bust, and demographic decline, surely he needs a population bomb in his underpants.

The beauty of obituaries for the still-extant is that they needn't be limited to those who are about to go home feet first. Preemptive necrology can be practiced on persons who are in the prime of life, especially if they've had their little turn in the limelight and will never do anything else of note if they live to be 1,000.

Maybe "prime of life" isn't the right descriptive phrase for Ted Turner (71) and Jane Fonda (72), Barney Frank and Harry Reid (70), Bernie Sanders (68), Christopher Dodd (66), Bernadine Dohrn (68), and Bill Ayers (65). They'll all receive medical treatment paid for with our Medicare tax dollars when they have the stroke they'll get after reading their Pre-Obits. But, aging though these pests may be, they strike this writer as the kind of people who will live on and on and, before they buy the (organic) farm, may be declared "national treasures" if we don't do something about it now.

Among the younger of the "dead-but-too-dumb-to-lie-down" we find Andrew Lloyd Webber (62). What a joy to get out the knives and hatchets and hammers and tongs and craft fresh reviews of *Jesus Christ Superstar*, *The Phantom of the Opera*, and *Cats*. A careful reinspection of the career of Donald Trump (63) might send the man to federal medium security prison (naming rights available). What a stink there is rising from the rotting corpse of the body of ideas held by Paul Krugman (57). And to Ben Cohen and Jerry Greenfield (both 59), late—as it were—of Ben & Jerry's, let us suggest the flavor "Grateful Deadly Nightshade."

Chronological age means nothing, of course, among show business types. They pop off at random all the time. An announcement of the untimely continuing existence of Lindsay Lohan, Paris Hilton, or any of the Kardashian sisters would provide an always welcome chance to denounce every aspect of what passes for entertainment in modern America. As a bonus, such advance post-mortems have every likelihood of proving more prescient than premature. "Sudden Collapse in Pilates Studio" seems a likely all-purpose headline. Let's throw in Sean Penn for good measure.

Plus there are quite a few show business types who actually are past their sell-by dates. Keith Richards is a high-mileage 66 and Mick Jagger is pushing 67 with a short stick. The members of the Who (those "who" remain alive) have a cumulative age greater than the number of hours it

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feels like it takes to listen to *Tommy*. "Hope I die before I get old," indeed. To make a detailed list of this category of geriatric star mark down everyone who's played the Super Bowl halftime since Janet Jackson's wardrobe malfunction, plus Janet (44).

Finally there is the Pre-Obituary of an individual that can be run as a regular feature: "_____ Mysteriously Not Shot by His Wife." The item is as predictable as "Hints From Heloise," but what newspaper reader will be able to resist a weekly—or even daily—peek into the ongoing living death of John Edwards, Mark Sanford, Eliot Spitzer, and Tiger Woods. ♦

O Canada

Looking north for economic inspiration.

BY FRED BARNES

Canada was called an "honorary member of the Third World" by the *Wall Street Journal* in 1995, and for good reason. Out-of-control spending, soaring debt, and the government's bite of the country's gross domestic product (GDP) growing at a furious pace—those trends prompted the *Journal*'s harsh putdown. Sound familiar? Those are exactly the trends that endanger America's economy and standard of living today.

Only with Canada there's a difference. Beginning in the mid-1990s, Canadians came to grips with their fiscal crisis. They cut spending at both the national and provincial (state) level, reduced the size and payroll of government, slashed debt, and produced what Paul Martin, then finance minister and later prime minister, called smaller, smarter government.

Canada is now in a far better economic situation than the United States. Its unemployment rate is lower, its budget deficit breathtakingly smaller (after nearly a decade of balanced budgets), its debt burden far lighter, its banks more stable. The Canadian dollar, once worth as little as .62 cents, is currently nearly at parity with the American dollar.

While not quite gloating, Canadians are eager to tout their comparative advantage. The authors of the new book *The Canadian Century: Moving Out of America's Shadow* wrote in the *National Post* last week: "If the United States continues on its current course, Canada will find itself without peer as a magnet for investment, immigrants, innovation, and growth." Had he been invited to President Obama's "jobs summit" last December, David Frum, a Canadian and prominent political commentator who lives in Washington, said he "would have advised: Learn from Canada."

One lesson from Canada is that major fiscal reform requires bipartisanship, with the initiative better coming from liberals than conservatives. It was the left-of-center Liberal party, facing what Frum describes as "nightmarish debt and deficits," that led the way with an austere budget in 1995. Conservatives, divided at the time, were supportive.

There's a simple explanation for the need for liberal leadership. If conservatives propose to cut spending and downsize government, reflexive liberal opposition can be expected. But if liberals advocate a similar approach, they're likely to be supported by many of their liberal allies and by almost all conservatives.

At least that's the way it worked in Canada, with impressive results. In Washington, however, the liberals in charge—that is, President Obama and Democrats in Congress—are moving in the opposite direction. Rather than retrench, they want to spend and borrow more. America "seems stuck in sterile partisanship," says Brian Lee Crowley, one of the authors of *The Canadian Century*.

Or perhaps it's because the United States hasn't reached the dire situation that Canada faced in the early 1990s after years of breakneck spending and borrowing. Government and public debt combined reached 53 percent of GDP in 1992, and Canada's future looked grim. The d-word was increasingly mentioned—default.

The national debt had doubled since the 1960s. Federal spending had jumped from 15 percent to 23 percent and spending by the provinces had skyrocketed as well. Borrowing was the second largest source of government revenue. Productivity growth was slow, but unemployment, like the government, was growing. Canadians were becoming panicky.

After the Liberal party took office in 1993, their first budget failed to improve the desperate fiscal plight. Surprisingly, the left-wing government of a western province, Saskatchewan, showed the way by cutting spending and balancing its budget. In the next national budget, finance minister Martin declared, "We are acting on a new vision of the role of government . . . smaller government . . . smarter government."

Taxes remained relatively high, but it was deep spending cuts that led to balanced budgets from 2000 until the crisis of 2008 hit. There were sharp cuts in regional development, scientific work, transportation, industry, and especially in transfer payments to provinces. "The provinces took the cue," says economist Ross McKitrick, and made spending reductions of their own. Another significant cut was in the government workforce.

The results have been remarkable. In two years, spending declined 8.8 percent. The size of the national government dropped from 16 percent of GDP in 1994 to 13 percent. As debt

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shrunk, once-gigantic interest payments fell dramatically.

That's not all. Canada's version of Social Security was put on a sound financial footing. Only one large government entity with soaring costs has been left unreformed: the single-payer health care system.

Canadian banks, in contrast with American financial institutions, received no bailouts in the banking crisis of 2008 and aren't targeted for a wave of new regulations. With a conservative banking culture, Canada largely avoided a housing bubble. Even government-backed housing loans require a 10 percent down payment.

The Canadian economy did slip into recession, and the Conservative government of Prime Minister Stephen Harper, in power since 2006, provided a stimulus. It was unlike Obama's in an important respect. It was purely temporary. Obama's stimulus spending has raised the baseline of permanent spending. Harper's government, by the way, has cut the national sales tax from 7 percent to 5 percent.

Nor does Canada accept any responsibility for the recession. "Canadians are looking at the United States and saying, 'You guys caused this,'" says Ken Boessenkool, president of Canada's leading conservative organization, the Civitas Society. "We're just getting the blowback."

Canada stands to benefit further from its conservative agenda. The country has higher tax rates, but if Harper stays in office another four or five years and Obama wins a second term, Canada may "emerge as the lower tax jurisdiction," thinks Frum. All the better for a country already poised to play a bigger role in the global economy. America, while still an economic superpower, may have to settle for a reduced role.

A century ago, Prime Minister Wilfrid Laurier made a prediction well known to Canadians but not to Americans. "The 19th century was the century of the United States," he said. "I think we can claim it is Canada that shall fill the 20th century." Laurier may just have been a century off. ♦

New Nukes!

On nuclear modernization GOP senators should swing for the fences. BY JOHN NOONAN

After just a year in office, President Obama has announced sweeping changes in the U.S. nuclear deterrent arsenal—one that has kept America secure for decades. In April the president signed the START follow-on treaty with Moscow, which provides for additional cuts to nuclear forces already reduced by President Bush. Nuclear disarmament is a noble enough goal, but it may come with a hidden price. America's nuclear warheads are decaying, and President Obama, in his eagerness to pursue an ideological vision of a nuclear-free world, has resisted maintaining and modernizing our force.

The need for modernization is pressing. Though most of the details about America's warhead stockpiles are highly classified, there are a few key points well known to close observers. Most of our nuclear warheads are 20-30 years old. The last weapon was constructed in 1991 and the last test detonation of a bomb occurred in 1992. The average age of an operational bomb is slightly over 30 years old, meaning many of our deployed warheads were built before President Reagan took office. Scientists who specialize in warhead construction and sustainment are aging and retiring at an alarming rate. By 2008, over half the nuclear specialists at our national laboratories were over the age of 50, and very few of those under 50 have the technical know-how to produce and sustain functional weapons. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates estimated that within a few years, roughly three-fourths of our nuclear technicians will be at retirement age. The National Nuclear Security Administration, a Department of Energy subagency responsible for the security and health of our stockpile, has lost over a quarter of its workforce since the end of the Cold War. Components in our warheads are aging just as fast. We no longer possess the capacity or ability to construct certain parts required in our bomb designs.

Nuclear weapons are different from conventional munitions, which can sometimes detonate decades after they roll off the assembly lines. Nukes have a limited shelf life, and are constructed using parts that decay and corrode. Warheads must be constantly maintained and serviced to be considered credible. But along with the exodus of critical lab technicians, so went the industry that supported our national laboratories with key bomb-making components. Older weapons are now cannibalized to service the active force.

Our nuclear delivery systems,

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which fortunately do not expire as readily as their payloads, are nonetheless in a state of decay. The B-52, the backbone of our strategic bomber force, is so old that the last airframe rolled off the assembly line during the Cuban Missile Crisis. Our Minuteman III ICBMs are products of the Nixon administration, and the *Ohio*-class ballistic-missile submarine was designed and initially constructed during the same period. And while Obama's new Nuclear Posture Review—a Defense Department crafted contextual framework for America's nuclear strategy—called for the preservation of our nuclear triad of subs, bombers, and missiles, it only committed to a replacement for the *Ohio*-class submarine.

Nuclear deterrence is predicated on two main assumptions. The first is that any given nation's atomic forces are capable. That means bombs go off when they are supposed to—and *don't* go off when they're *not* supposed to—that fuses detonate the weapons at the proper altitude, that missiles hit their aim points with reliable accuracy, that the command and control infrastructure that authorizes nuclear launch is robust and survivable, and so on. The second is that nuclear forces are perceived by our adversaries as credible. If we test ten ICBMs and all ten fail, our fragile deterrence equation deteriorates, shaken by the suspicion that our missiles don't work. America's nuclear infrastructure, weapons, and command-and-control functions operate with high reliability and effectiveness. But recent satisfactory performance does not mean the future of our strategic arsenal is guaranteed. The United States, as it happens, is the only major nuclear power (a list that includes both Russia and China) not currently modernizing its nuclear capabilities.

In fairness to the Obama administration, some progress on modernization has been made. The administration has bumped up funding of the National Laboratories by 10 percent to support the so-called life extension programs (LEP), which is one of the ways our nuclear weapons are kept operationally certified. Each LEP "option" is designed to modify a warhead in such a way that it overcomes natural decay, thus extending its viability. Weapons are modified by the national labs, one of the reasons properly funding intellectual hubs like Sandia and Los Alamos is so important.

Unfortunately, simply throwing money at the labs and calling it modernization is insufficient. President Obama has made it clear that he will not authorize a new nuclear warhead design, thus condemning the stockpile to endless LEP options, which some in the White House believe to be a silver bullet solution to the degrading arsenal. Though life extension does theoretically increase a nuclear weapon's lifespan, each LEP modification distances a warhead from its original design. Original bomb designs are

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unique, in that they were properly tested in an underground detonation of the device. Without nuclear testing, there's no way to determine—with absolute certitude—that a modified warhead will work. Unfortunately, President Obama has also made it clear that there will be no resumption of nuclear tests during his tenure.

There is a middle ground here. A few years back, President Bush authorized development of the Reliable Replacement Warhead, a new bomb design that was simple, cheap to maintain, and—most important—did not depend on nuclear testing to verify dependability. That's not a pie-in-the-sky concept. The first actual detonation of a uranium gun-barrel atomic device was over Hiroshima. Manhattan Project scientists were so confident in the weapon, colloquially known as "Little Boy," that they didn't bother testing it.

The same confidence reposes in the Reliable Replacement Warhead, which is a far simpler design than our current nuclear inventory. In fact, not only is the design uncomplicated, it's also weaker. Fortunately, 100 kilotons deters as well as 500 kilotons. Simpler also means easier to maintain, which translates to drastically reduced sustainment costs.

The lifespan of nuclear weapons, even relatively simple ones, cannot be extended indefinitely. Despite the gnashing of teeth from the Oval Office, a new nuclear weapon will have to be designed and ultimately fielded in the near future. If testing is off the table—as both Republican and Democratic lawmakers have insisted—then the Reliable Replacement Warhead is the best technical solution for ensuring nuclear weapon viability. It is, admittedly, not the best political solution. Disarmament advocates like the Federation of American Scientists and the Ploughshares Fund came out swinging when the Reliable Replacement Warhead was introduced in 2005. Fears of a second Cold War echoed down Washington's long political corridors, and Congress ultimately killed funding of the warhead before it could be implemented. Lawmakers should have taken a closer look—Russia and China are already up to their necks in nuclear research and development, building new delivery systems as well as toying with new warhead designs. Washington's right to experiment with new nuclear designs is not proscribed by treaty; objections to nuclear modernization are domestic.

The 41 Republicans in the Senate recently signed a letter to President Obama stating that his prized START follow-on would not be ratified without significant steps toward more effective nuclear modernization. The administration's response, beefing up national lab funding, was positive but should be recognized as a half-measure. Nuclear deterrence is simply too vital to national security to be done on the cheap, or to be compromised by ideological opposition.

The signatories of that letter should swing for the fences on stockpile stewardship. Fund and develop the Reliable Replacement Warhead, upgrade bomber and missile fleets long past their prime, restore and revitalize expertise throughout the entire U.S. nuclear enterprise. If our strategic arsenal is to be bound by a constricting treaty, then technical confidence and warhead reliability must be a top national security priority. ♦

Losing Asia?

If we stint on our military investment in the Pacific, we'll pay a high price. BY DAN BLUMENTHAL

After three decades of peace and stability in the Asia-Pacific, it is tempting to dismiss the possibility of tension and conflict in that critical region. But the breaking down of the post-Vietnam war great power peace should be a legitimate worry for the U.S. government. America's military forces have an important role to play in Asia for the foreseeable future. The questions for our military leaders are what are the Asia missions, what forces are needed, and how will we fight alongside our allies?

The remarkable economic growth of the "Asian tigers"—Taiwan, Singapore, Japan, South Korea, and, more recently, China—did not happen in a vacuum. Despite domestic political pressure, American presidents decided time and again to keep substantial military forces deployed in the region. This military presence, variously referred to as the "security umbrella" or the "oxygen," set the conditions for Asian elites to embark on the policies that led to economic growth and relatively peaceful relations. Without America as guarantor, those same Asian countries would likely have engaged in costly military competitions—perhaps even wars—and many would have tried to acquire nuclear weapons. America's forward deployment of forces and its network of alliances did the job, helping Asians set themselves on a course of 30 years of prosperity.

Yet, today, there are a number of developments that threaten the region's stability.

First, North Korea has conventional missiles that can destroy Seoul and gravely damage Japan. It also has a nuclear arsenal. The North's brutal dictatorship could, moreover, suddenly collapse: leaving South Korea, Japan, the United States, and China scrambling to find and secure weapons of mass destruction while stabilizing the state. The allies and China have very different notions about what a secure

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Korean Peninsula means. China's pursuit of its own goals during a crisis is a recipe for trouble.

Second, Southeast Asia suffers the scourge of radical Islam. The U.S. military may be called upon to help respond to terrorist attacks—as it has been doing, with a light footprint, for almost a decade in the Philippines.

And then there is China, which has the greatest potential to undermine the Asia-Pacific peace. China has translated its economic resources into an impressive and growing military arsenal. Its Second Artillery ballistic and cruise missile forces pose a particular threat to U.S. and allied air supremacy in the "first island chain" (Japan, Taiwan, and the Philippines). China's missiles could seriously damage and ground most U.S. air assets at our most important Pacific base—Kadena in Japan. The Second Artillery is refining a land-based anti-ship ballistic missile. China could soon have the capability both to establish local air supremacy and to hit any surface ship coming its way from the Western Pacific.

China has a growing fleet of diesel and nuclear submarines. The diesel boats, which can stay longer undersea, carry arsenals sufficient to enforce a blockade of Taiwan and threaten surface ships in and around China's littorals. With a new base in Hainan Island, China's nuclear submarine force has easy access to the South China Sea and the Malacca Strait. Given historic Sino-Indian mistrust and America's reliance on the Indian Ocean for its own energy trade, China's ability to cause mischief at critical Pacific and Indian Ocean chokepoints is a serious strategic development.

Some experts argue that just because China has developed these capabilities does not mean that it will use them to threaten America or its allies. India, too, the logic goes, is undertaking a military modernization program. This is simply what great powers do. But it is the character of a rising power that matters. Those who take comfort in the assertion that "all great powers do it" should consider China's revanchist claims, its troubling international activities, and its internal dynamics.

Even with a government in Taiwan that has abandoned any claim to independence, China has not renounced its right to use force against the island. It continues the unrelenting military buildup of a force across the strait that was only supposed to "deter Taiwan's independence."

The Chinese navy is increasing the frequency of its sojourns into disputed waters in the South and East China Seas. The Indians find themselves encircled by a network of Chinese maritime facilities. U.S. Navy ships have been harassed by Chinese vessels during lawful missions in international waters. The Chinese military is interested in expanding control of its maritime periphery and keeping the United States out. U.S. Navy access to these waters has been a source of reassurance to our allies during Asia's 30-year peace.

Beijing embarked on its military modernization program after the Cold War, a unique moment of peace and security in China's history. It did not choose to focus on homeland defense, on the threats posed by terrorism or nuclear proliferation, or on modest programs that would allow China to continue to grow in peace while guarding against potential attack. That is what the rest of the world was doing. Nor after the 9/11 attacks, and consequent threats to all non-Islamic nations, did China change its posture and contribute to global efforts to eradicate terrorist safe havens. Rather, it continued to invest in power projection capabilities.

This decision was driven by a deep sense that China must right the wrongs of the past and recover from "a century of humiliation." Taiwan needs to be reclaimed, Japan rendered impotent, and U.S. access to China's periphery impeded. Nor can China bear the humiliation of relying on the United States to keep safe the commons for Chinese trade. In the view of the hypernationalist leaders within the government, the rest of Asia must accept the country's rightful place at the top of the Asian political hierarchy.

China, in short, seeks to frustrate our most basic aims in the Asia-Pacific: maintaining the political order that has helped produce a set of mostly democratic and free market economies in the region and assuring that they continue to develop free from domination by any other power.

We have responded very modestly to the erosion of our favorable military position in Asia. During the Clinton years, we upgraded our relations with Japan and began talks with the Indians that led to a strategic breakthrough in the next administration. Under Bush, we also transferred maritime and aerospace assets into the Pacific. But no significant steps have been taken toward building a more robust deterrent in the Pacific, one that can face down Chinese intransigence.

There are numerous instances of American negligence in this regard. Our attack submarine program is unstable—with the numbers appearing to be shrinking. We cancelled the tactical air program—the F-22—that could have operated most effectively against China's sophisticated air

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defenses. We have not done the basic work of hardening and securing our present land bases or diversifying them. Our surface ship programs are shrinking and are not optimized for undersea warfare. Our most promising defense against Chinese missiles—directed energy—is not being properly funded. Our tanker fleet, needed to refuel attack aircraft in a region with very long logistical lines, remains depleted and old. New and promising programs that are in their experimental phases—such as naval-based unmanned aerial vehicles and long-range strike assets—should have been funded a decade ago.

In addition, we have only paid lip service to our partnerships. With the advanced economies and militaries in Japan, South Korea, Singapore, Australia, and India, real alliances require exporting high-technology equipment and systems. We have not taken the basic step of reforming export controls so that we can more easily sell our allies the weapons they need and then train with them on the common systems. (One particularly jarring consequence is that the French or the Russians may end up selling fighters to India, even though our airmen are more likely to one day fight alongside them.) All of these countries are investing in submarines, anti-submarine surface ships, cruise missiles, and tactical aircraft that can engage in maritime strike missions. We are missing a strategic opportunity to build a region-wide network of allies around common security concerns.

Our strategic requirements necessitate more military investment in the Asia-Pacific on an expedited schedule, as well as creative strategic thinking about building alliances with countries that are already funding their own military modernization programs. Investing properly in air supremacy, undersea warfare, and missile defenses will be costly. But the cost is nowhere near the price we will pay if the region—which has enjoyed a long run of peace, stability, and prosperity—descends into chaos or conflict. ♦

Russia's New Protesters

They're middle class, well educated, and young. BY LEON ARON

Saved by $80-a-barrel oil from almost certain economic depression and political crisis, Russia appears to have weathered the worst of the world downturn. Yet a wave of protest demonstrations has swept the country in recent months, demonstrations remarkable for their geographic range, the demographics of their participants, the choice of issues, and the savvy with which participants have used the Internet to communicate and mobilize. The sheer variety of political affiliations and ad hoc political alliances is unprecedented, as is the sharpness of the criticism of the government and of the hitherto largely "Teflon" Vladimir Putin.

Protests have taken place in at least 48 cities and towns. On March 20, the "Day of Wrath," demonstrations were held across 11 time zones, from Kaliningrad and Chernyakhovsk in the west to Vladivostok in the Far East. A change in what one Russian analyst called the "geography of discontent" placed the largest protests in the provinces instead of in Moscow and St. Petersburg, the traditional hotbeds of unrest. "Full-blown rallies and picketing" occurred, Nikolai Petrov of the Moscow Carnegie Center noted, in places "where as recently as a year ago even getting 20 people out on the street was a problem."

Another novelty was the profile of the participants. Until now the paradigm for spontaneous, nationwide, grass-roots movements in Putin's Russia has been the pensioners' protest against cuts in their benefits in 2005. But among Russia's new protesters, retirees and the poor have been largely supplanted by much younger, more affluent, and better educated demonstrators. The middle class "dominated" the 2010 protests, according to a leading Russian political magazine, *Vlast* (Power). Among those who stated their professions when they signed a "Putin-must-go" Internet petition, half were middle class (traditionally defined in Russia not by income but by education and occupation). Only 8 percent identified themselves as pensioners and 3 percent as pro-democracy activists. Indeed, even as the ranks of the new protesters swell, the established pro-democracy opposition parties and movements continue to draw little support.

Not surprisingly, the issues on the protesters' minds were different, too. In 2005, the pensioners either wanted more support from the state or refused to settle for what they perceived as the curtailment of their benefits. Today, many, if not most, of the protesters want less from the government: In addition to lower taxes and tariffs, they want less intrusion in their lives and businesses, less corruption, less incompetence, less arbitrariness. Their beefs with the Kremlin, according to an astute Russian observer, reflect the "systemic flaws of power itself."

Thus, the demonstrators raged at a situation captured by Russia's only remaining national opposition newspaper, *Novaya Gazeta*, in the question: What is private property in Russia today, a right sealed by law and contract—or a privilege, which the powers that be grant based on constantly changing conditions and take away whenever they want? As far as "big capital" (the wealthiest entrepreneurs)

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is concerned, the paper continued, the issue was resolved long ago and the answer is: the state. But now, the commentary concluded, rapacious bureaucrats are taking on small property owners as well.

For the first time, Putin himself became an issue. Up to this point, the former president, now prime minister and de facto regent to President Medvedev, has seemed politically invulnerable. The architect of the current political and economic system, Putin is increasingly held responsible for economic hardship, corruption, and the blatant disregard for ordinary people exhibited by public officials at all levels. To a leading liberal commentator, this was the most notable development of the recent protests: "people overcoming their fear" of opposing the "great and terrible" Putin. "Down with Putin!" "LiLiPut[in] get lost!" "Putin, shoot yourself!" "Tariffs/duties—no; resignation—yes!" read the posters in Vladivostok. "Putin Must Go!" demanded the St. Petersburg protesters. "Russia without Putin!" was a slogan in Moscow. In Siberia, 39 percent of respondents told a pollster Putin was "Siberia's biggest enemy."

Posted on March 10 on the "Putin must go" website (putinavotstavku.ru), the petition calling for the prime minister's resignation collected almost 7,500 signatures in the first five days. Of the signatories, 79 percent were not afraid to put down their full name and profession and even their address. A month later, there were 34,655 signatures, and at press time the total was up to 46,133.

Putin has created an "anti-constitutional system of personal rule for life," the petition reads, and no "turn toward democratic development" can occur as long as he continues to exercise the real power in the country. Putin will never resign: His determination to hold on indefinitely is a result not only of his thirst for power but also his "fear of being taken to task" for what he has done. Yet, the petition concludes, to continue to have a ruler like Putin is "humiliating for the Russian people and mortally dangerous for Russia. The country can no longer carry this cross."

On April 3, Professor Evgeny Gontmakher, a leading figure at the Institute of Contemporary Development, the think-tank rumored to be favored by the dauphin Medvedev, claimed there is an "active core" among Russia's citizens: those who believe that "we cannot live like this any longer" and who tie their hopes to the "European choice" of national development. Specifically, Gontmakher continued, these men and women believe that Russia needs real democracy, instead of an "imitation"; a market economy "with just and honest competition," instead of the present "ultra-monopolized" and "archaic" system, based on the export of raw materials; and a "socially oriented" welfare state, which, Gontmakher added, Russia does not have either.

It is too soon to say for sure whether the protests of recent months support this proposition. Those who demonstrate are still a tiny minority of the population. Yet the decidedly middle-class bias in their demographics and in the issues that brought them into the streets or to the Internet sites appears to place them well within the constituency for change identified by Gontmakher. The nature of many of the new protesters' demands is such that, as a Russian commentator points out, the Kremlin cannot satisfy them without creating an "entirely new system of power"—a system that, unlike the current one, "would not separate the interests of the state from the interests of its citizens."

Disparate though they were, the political, economic, and social issues raised by the protesters had a powerful unifying theme, a leitmotif: a plea for the restoration of human dignity, which is daily offended by the existing political and economic order. "We are Europeans," a leader of the Kaliningrad protests told a reporter. "Why should we live like slaves?" "You must take responsibility for yourselves and for your lives," an activist exhorted the crowd at the March 20 protest in Irkutsk in eastern Siberia. An elderly protester said to a reporter, "We have been on the sidelines for a long time, but we are not going to tolerate this any longer."

Revolutions have started with less. ♦

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The Big Squeeze

The Obama administration's defense budget portends strategic decline

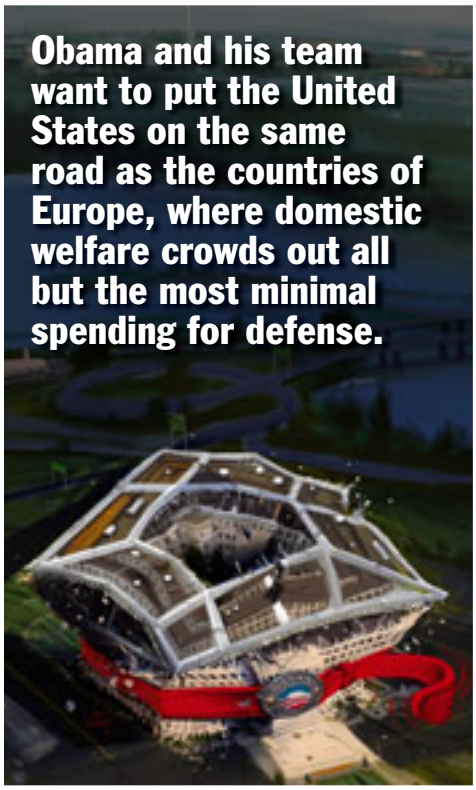
By Thomas Donnelly & Gary Schmitt

On the 65th anniversary of the Allied victory in Europe in early May, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates spoke at the Eisenhower Library in Abilene, Kansas. His speech was not about America's unprecedented, massive marshalling of resources, men, and materiel to defeat the forces of fascism that threatened to overwhelm the West. Instead, its underlying message was ultimately one of strategic retreat—signaling his and the Obama administration's view that the richest country in the world can no longer afford to sustain the military's current force structure and capabilities.

Channeling his inner President Eisenhower, Gates sought to make this message sound not only reasonable but morally justified by belittling Washington, the town where he has spent most of his career. Pandering to those on the left who always see defense spending as dangerous, he raised anew Eisenhower's overwrought concern about the creation of a "garrison state" and a "military-industrial complex." Pandering to those on the right who see the Pentagon as a gigantic sink hole for tax dollars, he dredged up the old saw about the Pentagon being a "Puzzle Palace" and stated that "the attacks of September 11, 2001, opened a gusher of defense spending."

The secretary—along with the Obama administration—wants Americans to believe there is no choice but to cut the defense budget given economic and fiscal realities. Just as there is no crying in baseball, however, there are no inevitabilities in politics. The administration is indeed squeezing defense spending more and more tightly, but that is a product of decisions made and policies chosen. They can and should be revisited.

Speaking of gushers, compare for a moment the size of the Obama stimulus package in 2009—nearly $800 billion—with the more than $300 billion Gates has already *cut* from the Pentagon's budget and the planned "flat-lining" of defense expenditures in the years ahead. And while the secretary talks about cutting overhead by getting rid of unnecessary generals and consultants, the administration has been busy hiring tens of thousands of new federal workers. Gates himself wants to add some 30,000 to the Pentagon's rolls to oversee military acquisitions. Surely, civil servants are not needed more than additional Marines or soldiers, given the back-breaking pace of deployments in recent years and continued overuse of the National Guard and reserves. And who in the administration or congressional leadership is arguing for tough love when it comes to so-called nondiscretionary spending (Social Security, Medicaid, Medicare, and service on the debt)? Right now, those programs cost three times as much as defense, and by the end of a two-term Obama administration they will cost closer to five times as much.



Defense spending has gone up. But never in our history have we fought wars of this magnitude as cheaply. Take, for example, the percentage of the federal budget allocated to defense: In 1994, two years after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Pentagon spending amounted to slightly more than 19 percent of the budget; in 2010, it is the same. And if the

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administration has its way, that figure will drop to 15.6 percent by 2015. Is any other part of the federal budget getting similarly whacked?

The budget increases that have occurred, moreover, are largely tied to fighting the wars. When Bill Clinton left the White House and Dick Cheney told the military that "help [was] on the way," the defense burden stood at 3 percent of GDP—a post-World War II low. When George W. Bush headed out the door, the figure for the core defense budget was about 3.5 percent. This is an increase, to be sure, but not one to make the military flush after a decade of declining budgets and deferred procurement.

In his speech, Gates stated that the U.S. military has more than 3,200 tactical combat aircraft—an impressive number. What he did not mention is that the vast majority of the planes have been flying for years, were designed decades ago, and are supported by a tanker fleet that first entered the force six years before Barack Obama was born. Critically, fewer than 150 of these combat aircraft are top-of-the-line, stealthy F-22s, production of which has been capped at 187. Yet even this number doesn't quite capture how limited the force is. Consider the F-22s needed for training, the dispersal of the remaining number among various bases, and the reality that for every plane on station there are two or three in queue, and you get a sense of just how few air-dominance planes we might have on hand during a crisis.

Gates also noted that the U.S. battlefleet is larger than the next 13 navies combined. True. But what he didn't say is that the current number of ships in the fleet, 286, is substantially below the minimum set by several previous studies of what the Navy requires to carry out all the tasks it is charged with around the world. Nor does he mention that this number is shrinking—and will shrink, if the budget stays as is, to levels not seen since the early 20th century. Undoubtedly, the ships of today are far more combat-capable than those of even 15 years ago. Still, numbers matter. Typically, for every ship on station there is one being refurbished after deployment and one undergoing training and work-up prior to deployment. Add to that the fact that the Navy is needed virtually everywhere—protecting the sea lanes, providing support for the wars, gathering intelligence, acting as a missile defense shield, and helping deter the likes of Iran, China, and North Korea—and one quickly comes to appreciate why a much smaller fleet, more widely dispersed, will become a strategic problem.

The tightening of the budget is also going to squeeze the Army. Putting aside the all-important fact that it precludes expanding the active-duty force, a flat or shrinking budget will also affect what equipment soldiers deploy with in future operations. Because the Army has been fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan, much of its equipment, especially helicopters and vehicles, has been chewed up by wear, tear, and combat. In the past, supplemental appropriations for the war effort helped meet replacement needs; the current administration, however, has halved that funding this year, requiring the Army to begin scrambling to find money in existing and future programs to cover costs.

None of the above means that there are not efficiencies to be found in the way the Pentagon does business, or that there is no need to get a handle on military health care and personnel costs. A good portion of the rising cost per serviceman, however, is connected to the realities of an all-volunteer force now in its fourth decade. In short, there is no magic reform wand that is going to make the Pentagon whole and healthy given the prevailing mismatch between defense dollars and American global strategy. Making the Pentagon 5 percent more efficient—a target any student of public administration would say is about as optimistic as one could be—will lessen but not solve this problem.

The challenge is to preserve the global international order built and guaranteed by the United States. Though Americans seem habitually averse to thinking strategically, we have actually behaved in a broadly consistent manner since the end of World War II, including the uncertain period following the Cold War. As President Obama put it in his Nobel lecture, "The plain fact is this: The United States of America has helped underwrite global security for more than six decades with the blood of our citizens and the strength of our arms." Now, however, the prospect of additional reductions in the size and capacity of U.S. military forces calls the "strength of our arms" into question: Will America continue to underwrite the great-power peace and the surge in human freedom and prosperity that it has secured?

The strategic success of the United States rests on achieving three things: the defense of the homeland, including all of North America and the Caribbean Basin; safe access to and the ability to exploit the "global commons," including the seas, the skies, space, and cyberspace; and a favorable balance of power across Eurasia. For all this to work as a "system," each piece must be in working order.

It took the attacks of September 11, 2001, to remind us not only that defense of the homeland comes first, but also that it requires the will and capacity to take the fight to the enemy. Osama bin Laden and his lieutenants may be getting long in the tooth, and their goal of driving the United States out of Muslim lands may be growing less probable by the day, but Sunni extremism will be with us for some time to come, as the Fort Hood shootings and the failed Times Square attack made evident. No matter how difficult a task, preventing al Qaeda and its allies from finding new nests in

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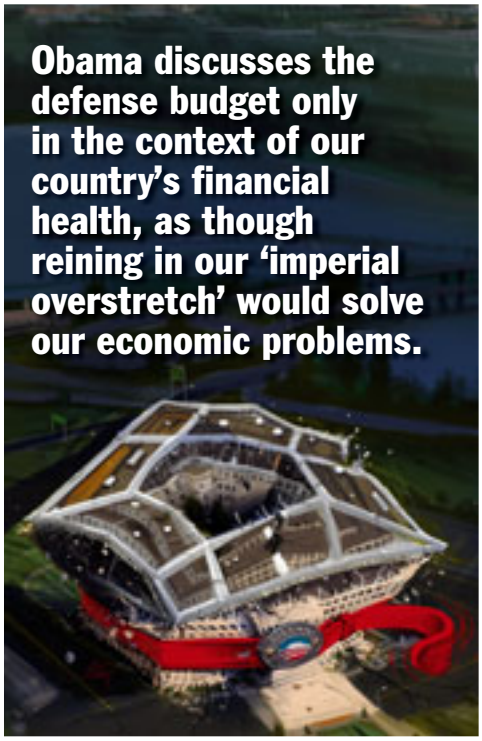
weak or sympathetic states is necessary if we are to protect America. Other tools of statecraft are important to this fight, but without sufficient military capability to take the fight to al Qaeda and its allies and project hard power in tough environs, these other tools will not carry the day.

The security of the commons—an awkward but nonetheless useful term—has long been regarded as an essential element in American strategy. But the protection of the realms outside the sovereign territory and waters of states is not just a strategic end in itself. It is the linchpin in America's capacity to keep the great-power peace and, in times of conflict, to dominate particular parts of the ocean, the sky, space, and the electromagnetic spectrum.

This is not a task that can be passed off to others or assured by treaties. To draw an analogy from city life, families and businesses need to know that police are present in order to feel confident that the streets are safe for routine activity; but they also need the police to be able to physically control the streets in emergencies or during spasms of illegal behavior. Compare life in most American cities with that in many northern Mexican towns, and the high cost of losing control of the urban commons becomes obvious. So, too, the international commons—be it the sea lanes to and from the Middle East or the atmosphere and cyberspace on which we depend for secure and instantaneous communication with our forces anywhere in the world. We would be foolish to take the peace of the commons for granted, along with the benefits we and others derive from it. Once we lose it, it will be extremely costly to regain.



The balance of geopolitical power among the states across the Eurasian landmass has always been a strategic interest of the United States. This was true even before the 20th century and the rise of America as a great power; Benjamin Franklin's ability to play the French off against the British tipped the scales in the American Revolution. And in the last century, Americans paid an enormous price in blood and treasure to turn back German and Soviet bids for dominance in Europe and Imperial Japan's attempt to build an exclusive East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere.

The current peace in Europe, fortunately, looks relatively durable. Russia's attempt to exert influence in the Caucasus and the "near abroad" is a security problem but one that should be manageable with a modicum of defense effort on our part and assistance to allies sitting on Russia's borders. That said, it does require some level of hard power both to deter Putin and his mafia from assuming they have free rein to intimidate surrounding countries and to reassure allies in Central and Eastern Europe that we have their backs.

But while Europe now is largely "whole and free" and far less of a security problem than it was in the 20th century, the "greater Middle East" has become a fundamental strategic concern of the United States. Initial attempts to address this concern by developing strategic partnerships with the shah of Iran or the ruling princes of Saudi Arabia produced no stable result. And so we have moved from an over-the-horizon posture to one of more direct involvement. The fact is, America's problems with Saddam Hussein's Iraq began well before 2003, and our interest in Mesopotamia will endure long after any "combat" troops leave. The prospect of an Iranian nuclear capability, frightening enough in itself, is perhaps more profoundly dangerous as a challenge to the stability of an inherently volatile region. Even if Iran is containable—even in the unlikely event that possession of nuclear weapons makes Tehran less prone than it is now to interfere in other nations—the response to an Iranian nuclear threat will most likely be to multiply the number of nukes across the region. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's promise to extend American deterrence to the Gulf Arab states and others may be strategically sound if we fail to stop Iran's acquisition of a nuclear arsenal, but it is a commitment that will require even more involvement in the region—involvement backed by significant military power.

And now our strategic horizon has expanded to include South Asia. The war in Afghanistan has morphed into a broader concern about "AfPak," reflecting the fact that the problems of Pakistan are potentially of greater consequence than who rules in Kabul.

But the largest strategic conundrum of the post-Cold War era is the rise of China. Hundreds of millions of Chinese have been lifted out of poverty, and that is a human triumph and a success of the American-led international system. But while Beijing has an interest in sustaining this system, its zero-sum view of geopolitics and the pattern of

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its military modernization call into question its own longer-term goals, with consequences for America's leadership position in a part of the world that directly affects this country's future prosperity. No one desires to turn China into an enemy. But if history is any guide, failing to make clear to Beijing and the other Asian capitals that the United States has every intention of maintaining its military preeminence in the region will invite the kind of arms race and power politics among states that can only increase instability in the region, to the benefit of none.

Seen from this perspective, it should come as no surprise that the National Intelligence Council's *Global Trends 2025* report, reflecting the broad consensus across the U.S. intelligence community, concluded that the demand for American security guarantees would only rise in the future. What the Obama administration is creating is a gap between resources and strategy so significant that it will be impossible for the United States to meet those demands.

The just-released Obama National Security Strategy reflects a drift toward a quite different approach, however. While it asserts that "there should be no doubt: the United States of America will continue to underwrite global security," it proceeds immediately to sigh, "We must recognize that no one nation—however powerful—can meet global challenges alone."

To be sure, the strategy states that there remains a need for U.S. leadership. But the tools it emphasizes—engagement, collective action, and partnerships—are emphasized as befitting a world in which mutual interests among states define the international scene. Given less attention is the traditional understanding that competition between democratic states and autocracies is the reality underlying our security requirements.

Similarly, the document notes the need to maintain America's "military superiority," yet it avoids linking that primacy to maintaining, or where possible expanding, "a balance of power that favors freedom"—a Bush administration phrase, but one fully consonant with America's grand strategy since the end of World War II. Frankly, ensuring America's role as the globe's leading military power is not an especially difficult goal to reach, given the declining defense budgets of most allies and the significant lead the United States has had over countries like Russia and China. However, being Number One in military capabilities is not the same thing as being preeminent globally and capable of deterring competitors, policing the international commons, and decisively defeating those who would go to war against us.

Although there are any number of sentences to be found in the National Security Strategy that point toward policy continuities with past administrations, the document's emphasis on the utility of soft power, on domestic renewal, and on issues unrelated to traditional national security concerns suggests a turning away from what have been the essential elements of America's longstanding approach to security matters. No one in the administration will admit as much, but the body language of how the administration is treating the likes of Iran, its lack of attention to our allies, and its unwillingness to even mention the word "China" as being of possible security concern all point toward a policy of strategic retrenchment. The administration's plans for defense spending give credence to this shift.

But rather than have an honest debate over grand strategy, the administration is pursuing its vision by consigning the discussion of the defense budget to the narrow band of our country's financial health, as though our economic problems could be solved by reining in our supposed "imperial overstretch." But that is false. Defense spending is not the reason America's fiscal house is in disorder, and cutting defense could only be at best a marginal palliative.

Undermining America's ability to be the primary guarantor of global security, moreover, will create the conditions for greater competition among states and a more chaotic international environment. And it will inevitably lead the United States, for want of military capacity, to put off addressing security challenges until they became more difficult and costly to deal with.

Gates's speech at the Eisenhower Library was off the mark in many respects. The United States never became the "garrison state" many feared at the start of the Cold War, and even in the wake of the attacks of 9/11, the re-balancing of civil liberties and security has been minimal. Nor is the "military-industrial complex" a real problem. Defense companies now amount to less than 2 percent of Standard & Poor's total market capitalization for the country's 500 largest companies—hardly the dark and dangerous behemoth many on the left imagine.

But Gates was right in one respect: The nation is at a critical juncture when it comes to defense resources. The problem is the administration's response. If Obama and his team prevail, they will have created a spending dynamic that puts the United States on the same road as the countries of Europe, where domestic welfare crowds out all but minimal spending for defense. America's role in the world will decline, not because we have tried to do too much abroad, but because we have chosen to do too much at home. For less than a nickel on the dollar of U.S. GDP, we can maintain our preeminence in the world and, with prudent taxing and spending at home, revive America's economy as well. This shouldn't be an either/or choice. It hasn't been in the past, and America and the world have been the better for it. ♦

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Recovering a Province

The rise and fall (and rise again?) of Khost

By Ann Marlowe

Khost Province, Afghanistan

"Few people in Khost support the government because the government are thieves!" Tall, gaunt Haji Doulat, 65, was fighting a headache and perhaps depression as he sat with the men of his family in his shabby, red-carpeted *mejlis*. Doulat lives with his brother, wife, sons, and many nieces and nephews in a modest family compound in a village between two big American bases, Salerno and Chapman.

I was used to staying at Salerno—less than a mile away—as an embedded reporter with the American military. But this time, I'd taken Doulat up on an invitation to visit his home. I'd come to admire him on four trips between the summer of 2007 and the fall of 2008, when I wrote about the progress of the American counterinsurgency here (see "A Counterinsurgency Grows in Khost," May 19, 2008, and "Policing Afghanistan," December 22, 2008).

Haji Doulat in his family compound

ANN MARLOWE

At the time, Doulat was the subgovernor of Mandozai district, in the center of Khost Province, which borders on the mountainous, lawless Waziristan region of Pakistan. Rated as the best of the 12 subgovernors by the American military here, Doulat was considered to have an inside track on becoming governor himself. (Subgovernors and governors in Afghanistan are appointed by the president.) A graduate of the German high school in Kabul, he was one of the more educated officials in the province. Before the years of civil war, he'd worked for the Ministry of Power and Light in Kabul, where several of his children were born. Doulat was fascinated by irrigation and would, at the drop of a hat, sketch maps of where dams should be built in Khost. I thought of him as the technocrat in a turban.

Haji Doulat pushed a dozen or more major Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) projects to completion in Mandozai: several bridges, $1.4 million in irrigation canals and dams, nine school buildings including a girls' high school, one medical clinic, the district's administrative office, and a big mosque. (There's apparently no limit to the number of mosques Khostis covet; there seems to be one every hundred yards, and in 2008 an American officer told me the ideal would be a mosque next to every house.)

In 2007-08 Khost seemed on an upward course, guided by good American counterinsurgency strategy. It was blessed by the combination of Navy Commander Dave Adams, an unusually active PRT commander, and Lieutenant Colonel Scottie D. Custer, the maneuver commander from the 82nd Airborne Division, who oversaw Khost between the beginning of 2007 and March 2008. The Afghan governor, Arsala Jamal, was educated and competent, and the American commanders designed systems to make sure he didn't dip his hands in the till of the numerous development contracts funded by American tax dollars.

In 2007, Adams's team completed 68 miles of road—there were only 9 when they arrived. An additional 11 miles, a road from the highway to Spera District, has been built since, bringing the total to 88. Adams's PRT also built 9 schools, 300 wells, and 35 irrigation dams. Fifty new schools were built in 2007 and 25 in 2008.

Custer, now retired, had secured Khost by dispersing about 200 paratroopers to live around the province in district centers. This is classic counterinsurgency strategy: Secure the population so they will trust their government. (Doulat reads it differently: He thinks it worked because it made the enemy disperse their forces to oppose the Americans.) When Custer turned over command in

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March 2008, the province was in pretty good shape with the exception of the Sabari district. Custer's successor Lieutenant Colonel David Ell was to focus on pacifying Sabari, beset by a tribal feud and a favored infiltration route from Pakistan used by insurgents.

The Afghan government had big plans for Khost, which the U.S. Army agreed to finance: a modern municipal hospital, a commercial airport connecting the province to the Gulf States where many Khostis work, an industrial park, an electrical grid and water system for Khost City. A USAID project, asphalting the unpaved section of Highway One, the Afghan ringroad that links Kabul to Khost, was to be finished by November 2009. Paving or repaving the 62-mile stretch between Khost and Gardez, known as the K-G Pass Road, would cut the travel time from Kabul to Khost from six to four hours and boost commerce.

But Afghanistan is not rich in happy endings. The airport was canceled in September 2009 as the Army took stock of increasingly out of control projects. The industrial park, electrical grid, and water system exist only on the drawing board. The PRT-financed $8.5 million municipal hospital building has just been declared structurally unsound by PRT and Afghan engineers, according to new governor Abdul Jabbar Naeemi. Work on the K-G Pass Road continues today at a desultory pace and the trip from Kabul is no faster.

More ominously, school attendence seems to be down. In 2002, 38,000 children went to school in Khost; in March 2008 the number had climbed to 210,000, including 44,000 girls. But as of June 2009, the number had fallen to 175,052, including 43,111 girls. In a country with one of the world's highest population growth rates, even with no expansion of education to new areas or families, there should be a substantial growth in school attendance. One reason for the decline might be periodic school burnings; another might be growing Taliban influence.

Haji Doulat says that Khost is more dangerous today than it was in 2008, though 700 American maneuver troops are here rather than Custer's 200, there are thousands more Afghan National Army and Afghan National Police here, and Khost is full of asphalt roads, schools, clinics, and irrigation projects paid for by American tax dollars.

Many Khostis have died trying to improve their province. One good subgovernor I met in 2007-8, Badi Zaman, was assassinated in 2009 by the Haqqani network. According to Adams, they feared Zaman would obtain American backing for a plan to raise a 200-man militia to pacify Sabari. Another good subgovernor, Mirza Jan Mimgarai, was slain in broad daylight in June 2008.

A valiant, 50ish police chief I'd interviewed twice, Bismallah, was blown up by an IED in the early part of 2010 in front of the Gorbuz district center he'd defended for years. (A sadly prescient photo of Bismallah in front of a police car destroyed by an IED was published in the December 22, 2008, issue of this magazine.)

Haji Doulat is still a subgovernor. Since August 2009, he's governed Tani district, his birthplace. It is one of only two districts in Khost he and the Afghans deem secure, and even here in his tribal homeland he must stay one step ahead of potential assassins.

"When I am going to the east, I leave the district center by the road that goes to the west," he says. Doulat always had me drive with his son Khandan, a cheerful, fleshy 28-year-old, rather than with him. Khandan told me that his devout father doesn't always attend prayers at the local mosque for fear of giving insurgents a regular schedule to anticipate. While Doulat lives in Tani during the work week, he returns on Thursday afternoon to spend the one-and-a-half day Afghan weekend at the house near Salerno. Though his neighbors are heavily involved with the Taliban, they are also members of his Tani tribe so he feels safe.

Doulat's view of the security situation surprised me. His son Khandan drove me around Matoon, Khost City, and Mandozai and seemed unconcerned with the possibility of hitting an IED—an ever-present danger in 2007-8. We drove around Khost City on all four days of my stay, and except on Friday, a holiday, the bazaar and business district were packed with pedestrians. On my earlier visits, the business district was a ghost town, stilled by fear of suicide bombings.

THE WEEKLY STANDARD

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A high-ranking American official later told me that both my perception and Doulat's were correct. He said the nature of the enemy in Khost had changed from 2008. Then there were four enemies in Khost: the Haqqani network, the Taliban, foreign fighters using it as an infiltration route from Pakistan, and, in the north of the province, fighters from Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's group. Now the Haqqani network has largely been neutralized both through Predator strikes on its leadership and elimination of rank and file fighters on the ground. The Taliban are less interested in placing IEDs to kill Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) and American troops—and more interested in assassinating government officials like Doulat.

"People with guns were the threat to the old enemy," the official summarized. "People with capacity are the threat to the new enemy." Colonel Viet Luong, the maneuver commander of Khost, Paktia, and Paktika provinces, had a different view. He says that while the Haqqani network has been "severely disrupted," its foot soldiers continue to operate against both local officials, ANSF, and coalition forces. Another American who formerly commanded in Khost said, "The reason the enemy doesn't plant as many IEDs anymore is that the people are no longer on the side of the government."

Dave Adams and Governor Jamal launch work on a new dam, May 2007.

U.S. NAVY PHOTO

Doulat survived a five-month stint in late 2008 and early 2009 as subgovernor of Khost's most dangerous district, Sabari. On Doulat's first day at Sabari, insurgents rocketed his office, and he saw an IED on the road about five yards before hitting it.

Doulat was given the booby prize of running Sabari because he opposed a group of people at Mandozai who attempted to block Khost's biggest project, the proposed American-sponsored airport (they wanted to build on the land themselves). People in Khost will lie, steal, and even kill for small amounts of land; seizing government land for private uses is a popular gambit. Many American-built roads have no shoulders, because neighboring landowners have encroached on them, in a classic tragedy of the commons. The unbuilt airport is Khost's biggest loss, though; it could have had an enormous economic effect.

Doulat often says "I am alone." He says he's the only subgovernor who does not take bribes, though he could have easily earned enough to never have to work again in just a few months. "Without my brother and son, I would be corrupt," he likes to say. His brother Haji Bakht Khan is a contractor, as is Khandan, and they have subsidized Haji Doulat's government service—in Afghanistan, usually the source of illegal benefits. Khandan tells me that he too could be a Khost subgovernor if he had $30,000 to pay for the position. Obviously no one pays that unless they can make more back. (Some American officials have told me privately that while they think Doulat is much better than average, he is not spotless.)

When I arrived at Haji Doulat's house on a Thursday afternoon, I saw that Khandan was accurate in saying, "We live very simply." There is no running water, just a hand pump in the packed dirt courtyard, where nearly naked small children play. Sanitation is iffy; I never see anyone use soap to wash their hands, and the family's six dairy cows graze just a few yards from the kitchen. They never get to go outside the compound, because there is nowhere to pasture them.

Khandan's white dog—kept on a 12-foot chain for the last three months—fares better while his master is home. Khandan seems to genuinely care for the animal, whom he has never named, and brought him a collar from Kabul. But he rarely lets him out even during my visit. If his dog were killed, he would be obliged to kill the man who killed him under the custom of the Pashtuns.

The family's women fare only a bit better than the dog. They are allowed to attend school till the third or fourth grade. As adults, they can leave the compound to visit relatives or a doctor. But none have been to Khost City 12 minutes away. The men would lose honor, Khandan explains, if the women were to shop in the bazaar, even in burqas, even with a male relative present. If they want a new dress, their menfolk bring them samples of material to choose from. Pashtun culture again. This is a far cry from the situation with non-Pashtuns in Herat, Mazar-i-Sharif, or Kabul, where women in burqas or headscarves routinely trawl the bazaar in small groups, without a male relative.

The guest room I'm given is remarkably clean, given the squalor of the family's living quarters. The men's *mejlis*,

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next door, has an inexpensive 20-inch TV set—a contrast with the 40-inch flat screen sets now standard in the barracks of the Afghan National Army. Bizarrely enough, my BlackBerry works here—the Afghan wireless phone carriers rolled out service to the big American bases, and Khost is small enough that coverage is almost complete.

At night in Haji Doulat's *mejlis*, talk regularly turns to the deterioration of Khost. Doulat and his family revere Scottie Custer and Dave Adams as great men; one wall of my room is adorned with two ancient guns captured on a mission Doulat undertook with Custer's paratroopers. A large photo of Doulat with Custer, signed by Custer, holds pride of place along with two photos of Doulat's father, a man revered on both sides of the border for his intelligence and goodness. As far as I can tell, Doulat's family are analogous to impoverished gentry in, say, 17th-century England; Khandan even uses the phrase "a gentle family" to describe them.

The explanations for the deterioration in Khost are complex. First, the security situation was beginning to worsen in early 2008, when insurgent suicide bombers destroyed the district center in Sabari on March 3 and damaged the gate at Tani the next day. In October 2008 a suicide bomber blew himself up at the Terzayi district center gate, and in November, an IED destroyed the district center at Dowmanda.

Second, the maneuver troops from the 101st Airborne that took over from Custer spent too much time chasing insurgents in the mountains and too little securing the population. A different unit of the 101st is now in Khost, though a case could be made that they undid much of the work of the 82nd Airborne the first time they were there (March 2008-March 2009). Notably more aggressive than the 82nd, the 101st killed four Khost civilians on April 21, just after my visit, in an apparent case of mistaken identity. (During Custer's command of 15 months, the 82nd killed just one Afghan civilian.)

Offering fewer carrots and more sticks, among other factors, Americans lost the support of some of the influential Khost tribes. The two PRT commanders following Dave Adams were ineffective. They didn't monitor the Army-funded projects with the eagle eye necessary here; unless contractors are inspected daily, quality suffers. Finally, Governor Jamal quit in late December 2008 and moved back to Canada, though he later returned to Afghanistan and is now minister of borders and tribal affairs.

Jamal's position was vacant for five or six months, and Deputy Governor Hamidullah Qalandari, who became acting governor, is said to have made more than $4 million in bribes during this time, building a luxurious home in Kabul. Former Governor Jamal says that this is an impossibly large amount as the PRT was hardly doing projects at the time.

"Qalandari belongs to a gentle family and is my father's friend," Khandan says. "But when my father was in Sabari District Center more than half of the [earmarked government] money was taken by him." Doulat's family also accuses Qalandari of taking a substantial bribe to permit villagers to steal the airport land.

Corruption in Khost has been abetted by lax PRT oversight in recent years. How could an American PRT allow work on the $8.5 million hospital to progress nearly to completion without noticing that the building was structurally unsound? Haji Bakht Khan, a younger brother of Haji Doulat and the financial mainstay of the extended family, explains, "In the time of Adams, they announced projects on [Khost] TV and every company could bid. Now they are given to the favorite contractors."

At an interview on April 10 at his compound, Governor Naeemi told me that he will reinstate the practice of Adams's command. Calm, gentle, and down to earth, Naeemi may help to rescue Khost; he won the esteem of American commanders in his past position as governor of Wardak Province. And some of the province's new ministers, who oversee departments like health, education, irrigation, and so on, are capable, and not yet tarred with corruption.

The long travel time between Khost and Kabul remains an obstacle to economic growth. It throws the province back upon Pakistan, just an hour away from Khost City. You can hardly use Afghan currency in the city's bazaars; Pakistani rupees, though technically illegal, are the currency of choice.

On my trip to Khost, Highway One seemed secure and well-traveled—more so than on my last road trip in March 2008. But three and a half hours into the journey, leaving Paktia's capital Gardez, the asphalt road abruptly shifted to potholed dirt.

Men and machines were working almost everywhere along the way, sometimes grading, sometimes relocating the road to a different spot. I'd remembered the surface changing to asphalt soon after the border of Khost, but I began to wonder if my memory was playing tricks on me—it was unpaved here too.

In March 2008, then-governor Jamal criticized the USAID road building plan, telling me that the Washington, D.C.-based Louis Berger Group, which won the contract, would use the same Afghan subcontractors the U.S. Army uses but at double the cost.

They've done worse than that. The May 2007 $100 million cost-plus contract held by the privately held Berger group, the subject of scathing exposés for its poor-quality, high cost school and clinic construction in Afghanistan, was subcontracted in May 2008 for $80 million to a joint venture

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of two Indian companies, BSC and CMC, the latter of which is actually doing more of the work. They in turn hired several Afghan companies. (Berger does planning and design; the Indian joint venture build.)

On my trip back up to Kabul, men were working on the road, but without machinery. I was later told by USAID civil engineer Robert Helmerick that the reason was that a day after my trip down, on April 10, 19 pieces of machinery, 15 of which were locally owned, were destroyed by insurgents. "This is the project with the highest rate of violence of all USAID projects," he explained. Four ANA soldiers were killed by IEDs along the unpaved stretch on April 21st, where Helmerick says IEDs are routinely found.

Because of the nature of cost-plus contracting, security costs for the KG-Pass Road, originally estimated at $20 million, have topped $40 million, all eaten by the American taxpayer. When the November 2009 completion date came and went, Berger was stripped of any potential incentive fees, but it is not responsible for the additional $20 million.

As to the previously paved surface having become unpaved, I wasn't losing my mind. The section from bridges 14-20, in Khost, had been paved by the Russians in the seventies. The contractors deemed it unsalvageable so removed the old asphalt for reconstruction. The scheduled completion date is October 31, 2010.

The locals seem to be on to a good scam: They supply old, worn out machines to the road builders, their relatives destroy them, and then they have the nerve to organize a protest asking for compensation.

The really bad news is that there is no scheduled completion date for the middle 22 miles of the road, plagued by attacks supported by the local Zadran tribe. The locals seem to be on to a good scam (as long as they don't give a damn about the road or its effect on other Afghans). They supply old, worn out machines to the road builders, their relatives destroy them, and then, as Helmerick detailed, they have the nerve to organize a protest asking for compensation.

The American officer I quoted earlier explained that Afghans know there are limits to their capacity, and don't complain when we begin with local Afghan contractors and later bring in foreign companies to do work they can't. But they are furious when we hire foreign companies at a much higher than local price—then use Afghan labor paid local rates ($8-10 a day, a good wage) to complete them. He added that one of the reasons Governor Jamal quit was his inability to do anything about the state of the road, even as popular anger grew. Former Governor Jamal says that he had warned Louis Berger at the start that hiring an Indian company was a bad idea, since Pakistan will disrupt any project near the border run by Indians. He also notes that locals think the road is an Afghan government project, though it is not, and point to the delays as another example of government corruption.

There may be a bigger problem in Khost, and the whole Pashtun belt, than corruption or the insurgency. It's Pashtun culture, which places strikingly little value on education, even for boys. Superstition, magic, rumor, and paranoia supplant rational thought at a certain point in almost every Khosti's mental universe. Haji Doulat is the most rational in his family. About the only evidence of superstition I can find is his crediting two gemstone rings he wears with preservative powers. (One of his nephews assures me that turquoise will crack if you do something bad or are in danger; his own ring cracked on a trip up to Sabari but later became whole again!)

The nonsense I hear from the rest of the men is less innocuous. Haji Doulat's brother says that the French Army is working with the Taliban against the Americans. He thinks that the Pakistani military maneuvers he sees on TV are staged for the camera. There is a general feeling—which I've heard from many Afghans—that if the United States ("the world superpower") wanted to defeat the insurgency, it would. So if the insurgency is gathering strength, it must be because the United States supports it.

And Haji Doulat isn't right about everything in Khost. Like many Afghans of his generation, he favors a degree of government control of the economy that has been discredited most everywhere else. The men of his family were angry that there were "ten different prices for rice" in Khost; they thought it should be regulated. When private builders encroach on government land, their first thought is to tear the houses down, rather than fining them. It's as though government officials like Doulat belong to a tribe—the government tribe—which must guard its prerogatives as jealously as any other.

Khost's problems aren't rocket science. While education and rationality are generational issues, common sense, courage, and diligence can go far in reducing corruption, systematizing administration, and organizing local support for the government. Afghans are unusually forgiving, and Khost is recoverable. But there have been too few men like Haji Doulat here, and too little American and Afghan support for those few. "Corruption is Afghanistan's number one problem," the American official stated. And then he quickly added, "And we are the number two problem, when we mess up." ♦

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Cord Meyer (St. Paul's '38) speaks to the assembled students of Groton, 1948

TIME & LIFE PICTURES / GETTY IMAGES

Prepped for Success

Are the old schools still what they were?

BY CHRISTOPHER BENSON

Growing up in the Rocky Mountain West, I never had a classmate uprooted to an elite boarding school in the East. That would have been tantamount to a Gamelan dance, or lunar landing.

The "foreign" has psychic sway on us precisely because it departs from our prosaic experience, luring us into an alternative narrative. My curiosity about boarding schools began with the autobiographical accounts in William F. Buckley's *Nearer, My God*, in which he remembered tearful homesickness, "smothering my face with the collar of my pajamas so that I would not be heard by my neighbors," and in C.S. Lewis's *Surprised by Joy*, in which he remembered "the gray faces of all the other boys, and their deathlike stillness" in the presence of "Oldie," the cruel headmaster who flogged students for "vulgar accents" and geometry mistakes.

The Best of the Best
Becoming Elite
at an American Boarding School
by Rubén A. Gaztambide-Fernández
Harvard, 312 pp., $29.95

My curiosity deepened when I enrolled in a summer conference at Phillips Exeter Academy to undergo training in a pedagogical method named after a philanthropist (Edward Harkness)—not a philosopher (Socrates)—who sought to revolutionize the classroom through student-centered learning. I figured that this might be the closest I would ever get to the hallowed (and perhaps haunted) world of the elite boarding school. Not so.

Enter ethnographer Rubén Gaztambide-Fernández, who does not let his readers forget that he is "a light-skinned Puerto Rican male" and was permitted, initially as a consultant and later as a researcher, to cozy up (emphasis on "up") to the predominantly vanilla, patrician class at Weston, the fictitious name he gives an elite boarding school in New England. For two years he sought to camouflage himself at sporting events, pep rallies, admissions tours, dorm lobbies, semiformal dances, dining halls, and classrooms, eyeing the "hidden curriculum."

As ethnographers go, he writes in the confessional mode of Oprah Winfrey, divulging his status-anxiety ("I was inescapably an outsider, and a 'lower' outsider at that") and the prurient—albeit academicized—mode of Howard Stern, observing the ubiquity of skin during springtime ("She is wearing a slightly transparent white tube dress that contrasts little with her fair skin, and that accentuates her curvaceous body"). Ethnographer is a

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misnomer, by the way: Here is a statustician, whose "quest for love from the world," as Alain de Botton diagnosed it in *Status Anxiety*, hides beneath his abstruse goal to examine "how students mobilize symbolic resources to construct and enact elite identifications, and the role such constructions and enactments play in how they negotiate other symbolic boundaries within the context of one elite boarding school." Only a student in the Graduate School of Education at Harvard could write such gobbledygook. Translation: The author examines how a youngster becomes what Lewis calls "One of the Most Important People There Are."

David Hume once noted that "it is not a great disproportion between ourselves and others which produces envy, but on the contrary, a proximity." The squinty-eyed monster of envy stalks Gaztambide-Fernández. At once he feels proximity to the elite, owing to his own Ivy League education, and disproportion, owing to his bourgeois family. His tone, as a consequence, wavers between reverence and rebuke. Boarding schools are elite, he declares, because of their typology (private designation), scholastics (curricular scope and sophistication), history (connection to elite social networks), demography (social class of student population), and geography (facilities and location). Of these five characteristics, the last is the most interesting: The spatial abundance of the pastoral landscape mirrors the economic abundance of the elites who carve their niche in it.

Boarding schools also qualify as "total institutions," a term that the sociologist Erving Goffman used to describe prisons, concentration camps, and mental hospitals, where all "aspects of life are conducted in the same place and under the same single authority." After reading *The Best of the Best*, the reader may conclude that there is an uncanny resemblance between students and inmates. Working, sleeping, and playing together, both groups employ insider jargon and erect hierarchies based on sexual prowess and worldly smarts. In addition, the schoolhouse and prison house are "bubbles," not only outliers from the proverbial "real world"—preparing their denizens to survive Wall Street or Main Street—but also shelters for delusions of grandeur.

Becoming One of the Most Important People There Are involves five E's: *exclusion* in the admissions process, where wunderkind-wannabes are selected from affluent households that breed a culture of competition, if not neurosis; *engagement* in the academic, athletic, and artistic opportunities at the school; *excellence* in the aforementioned undertakings; *entitlement* to privileges based on a self-congratulatory work ethic; and *envisioning* future privileges, including admission to elite colleges and universities, and access to high-status careers and leadership roles.

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Since the 1970s, American boarding schools have sought to diversify their student populations. Nevertheless, they still retain the appearance of WASPy kids in Ralph Lauren ads. Gaztambide-Fernández hankers for more diversification while recognizing the predicament that faces a black girl from Watts or a farm boy from Grand Forks who feels like a recipient of institutional paternalism. Their skin color and zip code are tallied up as a credit to the school—but at the cost of their experiencing the soft bigotries of white guilt and economic guilt.

A "discourse of distinction" emerges among the students at an elite boarding school, which serves a twofold purpose: To separate them from the hoi polloi, and to rank them among the aristoi ("the best"). Consider these statistics:

> In 2008, 16,043 students—roughly 0.10 percent of the more than 16 million secondary school students in the United States—enrolled in schools that could be categorized as elite boarding schools. While the U.S. public spent an average of $8,701 per pupil in 2005, elite boarding schools spent more than $46,000 per pupil.

Outsiders are denigrated as socially stuffed and mentally starved, whereas insiders are dignified by a hierarchy of smartness and workaholism. PGs (post-graduates unofficially recruited to sports teams) fall to the bottom of the totem pole. "Latin Distinction" graduates (the study of Latin for three years and a modern Romance language for two years) rise to the top.

Our author never scrutinizes fidelity to the Gospel of Work, which begins in the classroom and ends in the boardroom. If the average worker spends a month longer on the job each year than in 1970, imagine how much stress and how little leisure characterizes the elite worker, who tarries in the office long after the janitors empty the wastebaskets because an appetite for consumerism drives him more than a pursuit of excellence. The ugly truth that few Americans will confront is that "the Work Ethic's boss is Mammon," as the historian Eugene McCarraher puts it.

Beyond the sphere of work, there is the sphere of social interaction, where unofficially "reserved seating" in the chapel and dining hall segregates students according to the logic of whether they are cool or weird. At Weston, brainiacs and virtuosos are cool, with jocks and "posses" (the slick, fine, and beautiful) as the runners-up. By contrast, participants in SAHAS (the Society of African and Hispanic American Students), A-Club (the Actors Club), and GSA (the Gay-Straight Alliance) are seldom on the margins of cool, and usually downright weird.

Just as the Jets and the Sharks mark their turf in *West Side Story*, the cool gang and the weird gang mark their turf on campus: the former gravitating

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toward the "valley" side, featuring the football stadium, athletic complex, and baseball diamonds, and the latter gravitating toward the "hills" side, featuring the academic classrooms, theater, music building, and art studios. Gaztambide-Fernández notes that the valley side is linked to "dominant and static gender ideals, athletic prowess, traditional definitions of beauty, and definitions of 'popularity' commonly associated with non-elite school contexts," whereas the hills side is linked to "more fluid and thus marginal sexual and gender identifications, intellectualism, artistic interests like theater, and fringe activities like punk and 'alternative' cultural repertoires." The "perfect Westonian," he says, transgresses these turf lines, embodying the ideal of the "well-rounded" individual who, first and foremost, performs decently in her grades, then plays the oboe, exerts herself in field hockey, and socializes with the ease of a Stepford wife.

In the sphere of intimacy, our author observes that teachers seem curiously incurious about the pecking order at the school, as they sit at their own dining room tables, absorbed with their own children. Moreover, they are sideshows to the construction of a Westonian identity—which makes me wonder if the inmates run the asylum. When the adults are away, how do the kids play? Our "nosy ethnographer" reveals the bonding rituals, starting innocuously with dorm wrestling, midnight runs, dodgeball games, tailgate parties, Homecoming Weekend, prom fashion show, and out-of-town permissions, but progressing iniquitously to "porno night" initiation, gambling, drug deals, boozing, and sex on classroom tables.

If this causes parents consternation, ask yourself if the ethnographer compromises the integrity of his study when he stealthily buries the hint of darker debauchery in a footnote: "I have chosen not to share details of rituals I witnessed that might be interpreted as scandalous or that might mislead readers to interpret this book as an exposé of 'rich kids acting badly.'"

Gaztambide-Fernández concludes with cries of inequality, turning the spotlight on race, class, and gender, providing weak examples that suggest disparities between the propaganda of the school, which upholds diversity, meritocracy, and egalitarianism, and the practice of the students, which reveals uniformity, plutocracy, and male chauvinism. Monica, a brown-skinned girl, feels like she is a "pet" when white girls tousle her hair; Michael, a Southern boy on partial scholarship, feels ambivalent about calling himself a "Westonian" in his hometown; Krista, a day student whose father works in dining services, feels estranged from her classmates who buy Versace clothes on a shopping trip to New York; and Julie, an outspoken senior, feels girls police their intellectual visibility in the classroom to preen in front of the boys.

Phillips Academy, Andover (1951)

B. ANTHONY STEWART / NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC SOCIETY / CORBIS

According to our all-too-serious author, these feelings demonstrate "oppression in the production of elite status groups." Really? Carping about such "unequal distinctions" sounds frivolous, as if there might be a way to permanently straighten kinky hair or attire everyone in haute couture. It also sounds envious, as C. S. Lewis observed in his essay "Equality" in 1943: "When equality is treated not as a medicine or a safety-gadget but as an ideal we begin to breed that stunted and envious sort of mind which hates all superiority. That mind is the special disease of democracy, as cruelty and servility are the special diseases of privileged societies."

An essential evil at Weston is not social inequality but "paternalistic nihilism," a term from Cornel West that refers to the insincere and ineffectual do-goodism of the liberal power elite. This outlook is shamelessly expressed by the headmaster at the graduation ceremony, when she perfunctorily exhorts students to help "those in the margins of society" and, in the next breath, says, "You have worked hard, contributed to life, and opened doors of opportunity," so go ahead and develop a sense of "sophisticated selfishness"—an apt definition of elitism.

Ultimately, *The Best of the Best* disappoints because it gives us only partial access to the life of the boarding school, which is not so much the fault of its author as its genre. Autobiography, as in the case of Buckley and Lewis, proves far more satisfying than ethnography: The former is lived from the inside and the latter from the outside. Gaztambide-Fernández can only observe the "perilous social geography" in the boarding school, questioning whether he would subject his daughter to its inequalities, whereas Lewis can confess that he developed worldliness at a boarding school—"the desire for glitter, swagger, distinction, the desire to be in the know," questioning why parents would exile their child to a "concentration camp." ♦

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B&A

Modern Screwtape

The Devil is in the details of everyday life.

BY JOAN FRAWLEY DESMOND

Anger impairs cognitive functioning. Contemporary psychologists may accept that cautionary insight, but it hasn't filtered into the overheated realm of the New Atheists, prompting even a temporary cessation of hostilities against religious belief, the wellspring of misery since our species ditched their primate cousins. Click onto "The Virus of Faith," an online video, and listen to Richard Dawkins, the bestselling author of *The God Delusion*, explain how "irrational faith is feeding murderous intolerance throughout the world." Critics of the New Atheism assert that its momentary success underscores a larger problem of generally shallow public discourse on matters of belief and unbelief. David Hart recently shrugged off "the latest trend in à la mode godlessness . . . as just a form of light entertainment."

Mary Eberstadt, the engaging author of *The Loser Letters*, also strives to entertain, as she spotlights the most farcical elements of the movement. The author of *Home-Alone America: The Hidden Toll of Day Care, Behavioral Drugs, and Other Parent Substitutes*, Eberstadt is a sharp-eyed cultural observer. This time, she deftly channels C.S. Lewis's *Screwtape Letters* through the voice of a fictional twentysomething survivor of college hookups, detox, and Facebook relationship etiquette. Her darkly comic narrator, A.F. Christian, toys with the New Atheists' unexamined shibboleths and indirectly scores points for "Loser"—i.e., God.

Joan Frawley Desmond, who writes on religious and social issues for a variety of publications, lives in Maryland.

The Loser Letters
A Comic Tale of Life, Death and Atheism
by Mary Eberstadt
Ignatius, 150 pp., $13.95

A self-identified former "Dull" (theist), A.F. Christian has jumped ship to the "Brights," Dawkins and company. She keyboards a series of messages to "All You Major-League Atheist Guys" that dispense advice for increasing market share: It's time to tamp down the paeans to the glories of atheism. After all, its legacy is flimsy on lasting achievements, such as charitable institutions and high culture, while leading enthusiasts—Mao, Stalin, Hitler—have cut a bloody swath through the past century. A more effective communications strategy, A.F. advises, is to ratchet up the offense: continually catalogue theism's spine-chilling horrors, from the vengeful Yahweh of the Old Testament to the goose-stepping popes who still oppose scientific progress right into the digital age!

Like most of her peers, A.F. reveals an abiding interest in the subject of sex. At one time, she shared the movement's distaste for theist controls on the species's perfectly natural appetites. But given the present cultural context, some rebranding is now in order: If the Atheist Guys wish to secure their reputation as practitioners of disinterested reason, they must suspend their rants against the guilt-inducing power of traditional morality. In the West, at least, that bogeyman exited the stage eons ago, and the consequent rise in divorce, abortions, and male irresponsibility has since produced a "backlash out there that none of You seem to know about—one You might call *Ozzie and Harriet, come back—all is forgiven!*"

A.F. then refines her point:

> If our Movement is really going to go around arguing that the sooner we get rid of those rules, the happier humanity is going to be, we're going to get blown away by this kind of counterevidence. It's enough to make you envy Bertrand Russell and all the atheists who came before us, isn't it?

For sure, A.F. enjoys keeping her readers off-balance, juxtaposing awkward syntax with flights of transcendence, zany satire with stark elegies. But there's also a mystery embedded in her pilgrimage to atheism, and that puzzle deepens the reader's engagement. A.F.'s dysfunctional college years generated a good deal of data about values and practices that foster human happiness. She wonders if the New Atheism's arguments simply prop up self-justifying moral choices, while traditional religion actually encourages a concern for others—hardly a recipe for delusion. And A.F. can't help noticing that the Brights, despite their flair for media relations, attract few actual converts. The sticking point is that Atheist Guys don't really deal with actual relationships, the very stuff that makes life worthwhile. Meanwhile, religion anchors and supports family life, even as the love experienced within the home often plants the seed that grows into a love for God.

Now, A.F. isn't suggesting that nonbelievers can't create happy homes: Her point is that the Brights have ceded the whole realm of family life to the seductive rituals and teachings of the competition. And she doesn't have a ready explanation for this geeky myopia. But she throws out a few clues. For example, Bishop Fulton Sheen, the popular midcentury television preacher, made this pointed observation about the Brights and their proclivity for anger-driven cognitive impairment: "He who has fallen away from the spiritual order will hate it, because religion is the reminder of his guilt."

True or false, Mary Eberstadt dares to introduce the notion that if ideas have consequences, the New Atheists have good reason to set aside their moral posturing and rethink their next career move—after they get some couch time for anger management. ♦

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B&A

Existential Female

A new translation of the age-old question about Woman. **BY EMILY SCHULTHEIS**

Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, 1978

GIANNI GIANSANTI / SYGMA / CORBIS

Simone de Beauvoir's name is hardly uttered anymore without her relationship with Jean-Paul Sartre mentioned somewhere nearby, and that shouldn't be surprising: They were philosophy's Brangelina more than a half century ago. New information about their sexual exploits is still considered newsworthy. They have their own square in Paris, adjacent to the Café les Deux Magots, where they famously passed their days writing and debating.

But if you have ever taken a women's studies class, which is practically required at most undergraduate institutions, Beauvoir is less Sartre sex and more *Second Sex*. The revolutionary book that started the women's movement in 1949 covers the since-the-beginning-of-time history of woman and her place in society, in addition to a detailed examination of postwar woman's experience. H.M. Parshley translated and edited the massive work in 1952, and the famous cream-colored cover found on most college women's bookshelves featured an introduction by her biographer Deirdre Bair.

The Second Sex
by Simone de Beauvoir
Translated by Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier
Knopf, 832 pp., $40

Considering the waves of feminism that have come and gone (or rather linger) since the early 1950s, it was high time for a new translation, and Americans in Paris Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier have answered the call. Their new translation is more complete and more accurate than the first, including the long list of sometimes-obscure women that was abridged in the original translation. More important, they present a better, truer translation of the existential language that endows *The Second Sex* with the philosophical overtones that its author intended it to have. Whether read as a piece of literature, studied as a contribution to the philosophy of women's existence, or worshipped as "an act of Promethean audacity" (as Judith Thurman describes it in her introduction), *The Second Sex* and its readers benefit from the return to its existential roots.

For example, vastly improved is its best-known sentence—*On ne nait pas femme: on le devient*—famously translated as "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman." Borde and Malovany-Chevallier give the phrase the voice Beauvoir would most likely have given it: "One is not born, but rather becomes, woman." Granted, dropping an article is not a massive change; but it's important, and a great improvement. It re-endows the sentence with which Beauvoir begins the second half of her opus with the philosophical weight of *the essence of woman* instead of merely the biological and social meanings the original translation implies.

In fairness to H.M. Parshley, anyone who has taken a stab at translation knows that as soon as you begin you find trouble. Do you translate literally, or change colloquialisms into the new language? Which audience do you write for, yours or the author's? Parshley made his priority accessibility and readability for an American audience, using common turns of phrase and cutting parts he deemed too obscure or culture-specific. This new translation takes a more literal approach that slows the pace at times, and will ultimately cut down on the number of people willing to read through to the conclusion. But it is truer to Beauvoir's words and culture. The increased "accuracy" is annoying at times, but the fidelity to philosophical terms more than makes up for changing "Enough ink has been spilled" to "Enough ink has flowed."

These kinds of small changes make it clear that Borde and Malovany-Chevallier have a specific, specialized audience in mind: the women's studies student, who is already sold on the principles of the subject and has

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at least some familiarity with existentialist vocabulary. Their version is certainly more correct and more informative, but it lacks the poetry and readability of the Parshley translation. If you aren't on the women's studies wagon this probably isn't a book you would want to read; but if you aren't planning on an academic analysis of the text, the Parshley version is a gentler experience.

The Second Sex is steeped in existential language. Beauvoir ascribed specialized meanings to common words, and her usage can be odd. Some of these oddities—for example, capitalization of the word *other*—appear in the Parshley translation, but Borde/Malovany-Chevallier have deliberately (and correctly) translated the existential terms throughout. This is crucial for the academic reader, but cumbersome and unnecessary for the casually curious. And in addition to the vocabulary slog, the tone is different as well.

Take, for example, Beauvoir's introduction, for which I have always had a special fondness. It is now aggressive and defensive, and the translators, while being careful not to stray into anachronistic vocabulary, have adopted a very 21st-century tone. The first time I read the introduction to *The Second Sex* I felt as if I were talking to a particularly insightful friend who was encouraging me to look at the way I live and think about what it means. When I read it this time, I felt as if I were being lectured.

Simone de Beauvoir has always been controversial, and the aspect of *The Second Sex* that usually ruffles the most feathers is her overarching hostility to motherhood. From the time of pre-agricultural peoples, when man's dominance was established, to the modern woman "trapped" in motherhood, women have been doomed, she writes, to be mothers. Never having been a mother herself, and picking at the emotional scabs of a complicated relationship with her own mother—revealed especially in her autobiographical *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter*—Beauvoir takes an approach to motherhood that is not only unsympathetic, but unyielding to any who would disagree with her existential arguments.

On a larger scale, her wide anarchist streak is on display here, as in her novels and memoirs, and her firm status as a leftist will be an obstacle for any reader approaching *The Second Sex* from the right. But at its heart *The Second Sex* is the chronicle of an individual struggling with her place in the world, identifying the impediments to her liberty, and striving toward the greatest possible freedom. And though we cannot and should not make freedom fries out of someone as ineffably French as Simone de Beauvoir, there is something inherently noble, and intrinsically dignified, about an individual's quest for liberty. Her struggle is played out on a difficult, existential plane; but at the root of her project is a desire to transcend her situation, to reach for something higher and better, to attain the right to choose her own projects and strive toward her own goals in good faith. This account of one woman's struggle for profound liberty makes *The Second Sex* relevant and infinitely valuable. Even if I prefer the earlier, Parshley translation. ♦

B&A

Historian of England

Lord Macaulay survives another academic assault.

BY EDWIN M. YODER JR.

Here, in a nutshell, is the paradox of Thomas Babington Macaulay: Dip at random into this most fluent of historians, and no reader acquainted with the muddle and tragedy of human striving can believe that the past could be so schematic and colorful as he paints it—still less that the winners were so much more virtuous than the losers. Yet one is swept along, as if in a torrent, by the force and brilliance of the prose. And what is more, one is delighted!

Macaulay
The Tragedy of Power
by Robert E. Sullivan
Harvard, 624 pp., $39.95

No historian writing in English, with the possible exception of Edward Gibbon, has ever been more captivating, nor more annoying in his peculiarities. From the age of 24, when he won first acclaim with a powerful essay vindicating Milton's Roundhead politics, Macaulay rarely failed to popularize what he touched. Students of English history and letters on both sides of the Atlantic long relished his *History of England*, a historical melodrama celebrating the "Glorious Revolution" of 1688: the supplanting of James II by the last Stuart king's Protestant daughter Mary and her Dutch consort, a foundation stone of the whig interpretation of history, the triumph of parliament over the crown.

An excerpt from his essay on Sir James Mackintosh, a forerunner in the writing of whiggish history, suggests the flavor:

> Far be it from us to disturb with our doubts the repose of any Oxonian Bachelor of Divinity who conceives that the English prelates with their baronies and palaces, their purple and their fine linen, their mitred carriages and their sumptuous tables, are the true successors of those ancient bishops who lived by catching fish and mending tents. We say only that the Scotch . . . were not Episcopalians; that they could not be made Episcopalians . . . that the fullest instruction on the mysterious questions of the Apostolical succession and the imposition of hands

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> had been imparted by the very logical process of putting the legs of the students into wooden boots, and driving two or more wedges between their knees . . . yet that . . . the covenanters were as obstinate as ever.

Here one finds the usual devices of Macaulay's trickery, especially the binary tension between supposedly irreconcilable opposites (gaudy bishops versus humble fishermen!) and subtle but amusing sarcasm (the "logical process" of torture and coercion). Macaulay's rhythms and doctrine insinuated themselves into the memory of his readers, although he is less read today, unfortunately. But by the mid-19th century his sales were hardly inferior to those of Dickens. He had kept his resolve to place histories alongside the three-decker novels on the reading tables of young ladies.

Writing before the craft of history became professionalized and academic, Macaulay earned his insights in the public arena. He was elected to Parliament from a pocket borough and starred in the debates over the 1832 Reform Bill. He later served, controversially, as a legal adviser, reformer, and administrator in British India. Macaulay has been lucky in his biographers. The first was his nephew, George Otto Trevelyan, a major historian in his own right who published a classic Victorian life and letters of Macaulay in 1875. He was followed a century later by the Harvard historian John Clive, who wrote brilliantly about the first half of Macaulay's public life but covered only the years down to 1838 when the historian returned from four years in India. Among many secondary and critical works, Sir Charles Firth's commentary on the *History of England* is notable.

In the biography under review, Robert E. Sullivan of Notre Dame claims to write as a Clive disciple. But his book offers an odd variation on Clive's. Unless he writes with the iconoclastic genius of a Lytton Strachey, a biographer is well advised to be in sympathy with his subject, or at least reasonably respectful. Robert E. Sullivan is no Lytton Strachey, and at some point he clearly conceived a strong distaste for his subject and what he stood for, above all the imperialist ideology of Victorian England.

Sullivan is well informed, in his way, although some of his observations seem oddly gratuitous, even coarse: for instance, his dismissive observations about the Oxford Tractarians, who sought to reclaim catholicity for the Church of England. Macaulay himself sprang from an evangelical background, and according to Sullivan his own faith was mere formal pretense. Indeed, many of Macaulay's observations on the 17th-century clergy are raw to the point of vulgarity. It is all rather understandable when one considers the hectoring he suffered from a bigoted, bullying, self-righteous father. But Sullivan carries dismissiveness rather far when, for instance, he refers to Cardinal Newman as "England's most notorious 'pervert' [sic] to Catholicism."

Macaulay's sales were hardly inferior to those of Dickens. He had kept his resolve to place histories alongside the three-decker novels on the reading tables of young ladies.

Sullivan's subtitle, "the tragedy of power," is likewise puzzling. It seems to spring from his view that Macaulay became, at least theoretically, an early apologist for genocide, when and if harsh measures became the price of ruling subordinate peoples. But fairly read, Macaulay's long essay on Warren Hastings and his administration of British India refutes these charges of extraordinary inhumanity. Besides, whatever power Macaulay disposed lay in essays, parliamentary speeches, and such official papers as his "minute" on Indian education, favoring the English language and Western learning. He warred, when he warred, with words.

It seems to annoy Sullivan that, when Macaulay shipped off to India in the mid-1830s, he took along his favorite Greek authors and read them first thing every morning, presumably viewing administrative and cultural problems in India through imported Western lenses. A fair point, perhaps, but one that could be lodged against almost any representative of the imperial mindset. Then there is Sullivan's intrusive use of Macaulay's private journals, which for years were discreetly suppressed or censored by his family. Macaulay recorded passing moods and grudges with a candor surely grounded in the confidence that these pages would remain private. Sullivan gathers (he isn't the first to do so) that Macaulay, a bachelor who doted on his family connections, loved his two youngest sisters with a fondness bordering on the erotic. He assures us, however, that while Macaulay appeared unconscious that "his relationship to his sisters"—quoting Thomas Pinney—"was latently incestuous," he "was no Humbert Humbert," no such voyeuristic pedophile as the antihero of Nabokov's *Lolita*!

It is unusual to find a biographer so involved in prurient speculation—or at least it once was. It is hard to say just what Sullivan is implying in these exotic glosses of writings that have been read for a century-and-a-half, and more, without the discovery of this evil shadow self. He has, in sum, written an ill-tempered biographical caricature. But he does get one thing right: A late chapter is entitled "Praeceptor Gentis Anglorum," mentor of the English people. Indeed, no historian was more influential in establishing the conventional outlook on the English past, reinforced as it was later on by the writing of his successor kin among the Trevelyans. That this outlook has been under assault for the better part of a century, notably by the great Sir Lewis Namier and his followers in the field of microhistory, is in its way a tribute to Macaulay's enduring power to instruct and enchant, to entertain and persuade. And at times, to vex and infuriate. ♦

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B&A

Wheeldon's Turn

The ambassador of dance reinvents himself—again.

BY NATALIE AXTON

In February, the news broke that Christopher Wheeldon was stepping down as artistic director of Morphoses/the Christopher Wheeldon Company, the internationally acclaimed ballet troupe he founded just three years ago. Within the dance community, this was seismic: Many were shocked, but few were surprised. And although the company's cofounder, Lourdes Lopez, quickly released a statement rebranding it as a curatorial venture (also called Morphoses), it is presumed that the company, which takes its name from one of Wheeldon's ballets, will collapse in due course without Wheeldon at the helm.

The business of dance has always been organized around shifting collectives: Companies have formed, and inevitably disappear, when collaborators, directors, and dancers die or become irrelevant. Fleeting is the norm. What was remarkable about Morphoses/the Wheeldon Company is that it was spectacularly successful—but not as successful as Wheeldon on his own. Christopher Wheeldon was born in England in 1973, trained in London, joined the Royal Ballet in 1991, and two years later came to the New York City Ballet. He soon began choreographing, and in 2001 his first ballet for the company, *Polyphonia*, was a triumph.

Since the death of George Balanchine in 1983, New York dance audiences have hungered for an heir, and *Polyphonia*, the first of several Wheeldon ballets set to the music of György Ligeti, promised much in terms of geometry and musicality. Wheeldon was named resident choreographer, and more good work followed: In principal dancer Wendy Whelan, a sensitive performer in a thin, scoliotic physique, Wheeldon found his muse; in turn, Whelan's idiosyncrasies added meaning to Wheeldon's work. The artistic capital of the New York City Ballet was again on the rise, and everyone was happy.

Christopher Wheeldon and students, 1999

MARIO RUIZ / TIME LIFE PICTURES / GETTY

Six years later, Wheeldon announced he was leaving City Ballet to start his own company. The excitement of a major choreographer directing a new ballet company overshadowed any questions about his departure. Morphoses/the Wheeldon Company (M/WC), however atrocious its name, was to be more than a showplace for Wheeldon's dances: The company would perform the work of other choreographers as well. His long-term goal was to develop a repertory company of 20 full-time dancers, splitting residency between London's Sadler's Wells Theater and the New York City Center, birthplace of the City Ballet.

I first met Wheeldon last year at a lingerie shop in Soho. M/WC was teaming with La Perla for a fundraiser. It was an early spring evening, and the event was packed: Young professionals queued at the bar while dancers modeled couture in the shop window. Wheeldon made some brief, energetic remarks about the company's upcoming season. As dance ambassador, he can be charming: Everyone turned to listen to the choreographer, and for a moment I forgot I was in a room full of bankers ogling women ogling expensive underwear.

"The New York City Ballet audience is dying," he said to me later. Wheeldon has been ahead of the curve on the graying of the ballet audience. When the National Endowment for the Arts released its 2008 Survey of Public Participation in the Arts, it noted that attendance at public performances is down across the board. Ballet has been particularly hard hit, with attendance down nearly 50 percent since 1982, the first year the NEA began collecting data. The core audience for ballet in 2002, the year of the previous survey, was the 35-54 year age group; in 2008 the core audience was 65-74.

For years the press on both sides of the Atlantic has been proclaiming Wheeldon to be the "savior" of ballet, and he did his part to encourage them. In an interview in London's *Observer* he suggested that he was the heir not to Balanchine but to Serge Diaghilev, and that Morphoses was a 21st-century Ballets Russes. On its website M/WC declared that its mission was to "broaden the scope of classical ballet by emphasizing innovation and fostering creativity through collaboration." Without quite explaining how, the company would make ballet accessible to a younger audience, and a silly, splashy ad campaign declared the company was making ballet "sexy" again.

With the best of intentions, however, Wheeldon had walked into the big trap of postwar creative life: trying to

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reconcile artistic innovation with audience expansion. And in marketing for mass appeal, Wheeldon broke the cardinal rule of ballet: Always keep your mouth shut. Ballet in New York has a deep psychological need to feel important again—but only on its own terms. Self-promotion is anathema to the old guard, and by the time of M/WC's overly ambitious New York premiere, there were signs of Wheeldon fatigue in the dance press. Its debut season sold well but was not a critical success.

As it happens, I never caught Wheeldon fever. His work has always struck me as more than a little pose-y, and the choreographic project was disappointing. Too many of the non-Wheeldon ballets were duds, and artsy videos of dancers in and out of rehearsal connected the program elements—always a defeatist strategy.

If Morphoses is to succeed as a curatorial project, its tastes need to be refined. But if you look at Morphoses as a formal experiment, it was going reasonably well: Last summer the company performed with singer Martha Wainwright in Central Park, attracting a large nondance audience, and next year it's booked for the Kennedy Center in Washington. Donations were up, the press coverage was ongoing. Wheeldon the impresario was balancing the creative and the pragmatic. And then, without warning, he walked away.

In the media, there were two reactions. Some thought that directing a company limited Wheeldon's creative abilities; others insisted that he gave up on the only mission that matters: building an institution. The official reason for Wheeldon's departure was that he couldn't maintain a steady group of dancers. Cofounder Lourdes Lopez, who said that Wheeldon wouldn't give the company enough of his time, hopes to mitigate such problems by turning the new Morphoses into a high-profile residency program.

If you suspect none of this makes much sense, you're not alone. And three-and-a-half months later, for Christopher Wheeldon, it's back to business as usual. New York City Ballet's spring season features seven world premiere ballets by seven blue-chip choreographers. Wheeldon's new ballet premieres May 29, one of the five ballets for which the architect Santiago Calatrava designed a set piece. (This season, titled "Architecture of Dance," is yet another way ballet is trying to save itself: The gala performance began with a toast to Calatreva from Ballet Master-in-Chief Peter Martins, and then a video explained who Calatrava is and how wonderful it is for all these ballet people to be working with him.)

Ballet may be in crisis, and its audience going gray; but Christopher Wheeldon has perfected the art of survival. ♦

B&A

Abu Dhabi Do

A movie where 'I Am Woman' is sung without irony.

BY JOHN PODHORETZ

In 1985, a journalist named Alex Heard and a Capitol Hill staffer named Scott Richardson coined the invaluable term "hathos" to describe the cringe-inducing feeling generated by celebrity self-congratulation and sentimental pandering. In a 1987 *Washington Post* piece, Heard offered this example: "Hearing the audience applaud when Dr. Joyce Brothers told Merv Griffin that, aside from being a brilliant comedienne, Charo is a 'genius on the classical guitar' filled me with hathos."

Sex and the City 2
Directed by Michael Patrick King

The episode of the *Merv Griffin Show* that so inspired Heard a quarter-century ago has now been supplanted in the annals of hathos by the epic new cinematic document named *Sex and the City 2*. One hesitates to call this thing a "movie," as that might suggest it has characters that behave with any consistency from scene to scene and that there is something that even nominally passes for a plot. In fact, its unimaginable running time of two hours and 27 minutes indicates that writer-director Michael Patrick King has modeled his picture not on *Sex and the City*'s snappy 27-minute television episodes but rather on the endless Jerry Lewis Labor Day Telethons of yore.

As in those supreme hathosfests, celebs pop in and out of this movie to show the flag and offer their support—a Penelope Cruz here, a Miley Cyrus there—while the male actors exist primarily to take calls from their wives like the obscure performers who once manned telethon phones.

This is a film that begins with four actresses ranging in age from 45 to 55 trying to pass for 25. It then segues into a gay wedding scene with a 30-man chorus singing "If Ever I Would Leave You" from *Camelot*. Dissolve to: a reception in which Liza Minnelli—her face looking as though it were Silly Putty that had been smooshed onto her skull—warbles Beyonce's "Single Ladies" in a rendition so agonizingly out of key that it makes one long for the version featuring CGI-created rodents in last year's *Alvin and the Chipmunks: The Squeakquel.*

There are so many insulting gay jokes in this movie, from beginning to end, that I half-expected someone from ACT-UP to appear in my theater and throw blood on the screen. But of course, gay jokes have become a key element in 21st-century hathos: the way Sammy Davis Jr.'s conversion to Judaism in the mid-'50s was somehow a simultaneous indicator in its day of Judaism's coolness, and an indication that Judaism's coolness was reaching its endpoint. Soon homosexuals will have to turn straight to be even the least bit transgressive.

Eventually we travel with Carrie,

John Podhoretz, editor of Commentary, *is* The Weekly Standard*'s movie critic.*

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Charlotte, Miranda, and Samantha—the New York quartet we have followed through six seasons of the never-less-than-interesting HBO sitcom, then through one terrible but hugely successful movie, and now this 147-minute celluloid spill that makes *Showgirls* look like *Schindler's List*—to Abu Dhabi for an all-expenses-paid vacation that King wants us to think our girls really need. It seems that being a zillionaire happily married successful writer is hard for Carrie; being a zillionaire happily married mother of two is hard for Charlotte; being a rich lawyer with a boss who holds his hand up when she talks is hard on Miranda; and Samantha has hot flashes. The ladies end up sucking down their trademark girlie drinks in a karaoke bar in Abu Dhabi before taking the stage to sing Helen Reddy's 1972 pseudo-anthem, "I Am Woman."

"I am strong, I am invincible," they warble, while belly dancers gyrate and Arab women pump their fists gratefully to these words of their deliverance from chattelhood by one of the worst pop songs ever written. Later, women wearing burqas uncover themselves to reveal the latest New York fashions. "Louis Vuitton!" Carrie squeals.

No, this isn't mere hathos. The *Sex and the City* quartet are the Four Horsewomen of the Hathocalypse. Does that seem like a labored coinage? It's nothing next to King's horrendous screenplay, which is filled with awful puns intended to spice up next week's book club. Carrie has written a memoir of her first year of marriage entitled *I Do, Do I?* A pretty Irish nanny is dubbed "Erin Go Braless." Carrie tells her husband, who's complaining that there's no food in the house, "You knew when you married me I was more Coco Chanel than Coq au Vin." When one of the ladies isn't facing up to a marital problem, the others announce they are performing an "inter-friend-tion." An Arab potentate is described as "one chic sheikh." A tent in the desert is dubbed "Bedouin Bath and Beyond."

And then there are the quips. Charlotte's four-year-old daughter asks whether Carrie is going to be a princess in the desert like Jasmine from the Disney movie *Aladdin*. "Yes, sweetie, just like Jasmine, only with cocktails!" Carrie says, in a piece of *har-har-har! live-live-live!* Auntie Mame-style dialogue that you could imagine Totie Fields telling Ed McMahon at 3:30 in the morning during one of Jerry Lewis's Percodan breaks. After Carrie and her husband spend a night in a hotel watching *It Happened One Night*, he buys a flat-screen TV for their bedroom so they can continue to enjoy old black-and-white movies together.

"The key word is old," she complains and says that sure, she enjoyed it, but only because "it only happened one night!"

As for the foursome's trip to the Middle East, suffice it to say all of them save Miranda do ridiculous, embarrassing, and idiotic things that imperil their safety and their lives, and squeal like nine-year-olds at a sleepover whenever they see anything expensive. When the first *Sex and the City* movie opened in 2008, I was astonished to discover just how powerfully its melancholy portrait of how the quartet had actually failed to find the happily-ever-after promised them in the final television episode resonated with so many women.

I suppose it's possible that the childish, petulant, and dumb behavior they exhibit in this astoundingly vapid sequel will resonate as well, and that karaoke machines across the land will resound anew with the strains of "I Am Woman." Only in this case, the appropriate lyric would be "I am hathos. Hear me bore." ♦

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"Rep. Joe Sestak, winner of the Pennsylvania Democratic Senate primary, is refusing to provide more information on what job he was offered by a White House official to drop [out] of that race, although he confirmed again that the incident occurred." —Politico, May 23, 2010

PARODY

OFFICE OF
CONGRESSIONAL LIAISON

January 30, 2010

Honorable Joe Sestak
1022 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear ~~Representative Sestak:~~ Joe, My Man

I am writing to you regarding the informal and totally hypothetical conversation we had last week in the Oval Office, in which we explored what best possible way you can serve not only the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania but also the United States of America and even the world. As you may recall, Bill, Rahm, and I had several suggestions for you, aside from running as a candidate for U.S. Senate. Have you given any more thought to this?

I know how much you love to travel across the Keystone State, so imagine traveling halfway around the world, to the cradle of civilization. Yes, I am talking about the Middle East. As you know, things have stalled between the Palestinians and the Zionists. We sure could use some extra help in the form of a special envoy. You'd have security and travel comfortably. We would also provide all of your meals (breakfast is continental) and accommodations (except for in-room entertainment). The weather is always warm and the people are friendly to your face. I won't be demanding any immediate solutions from you. You'd have until the fall of 2012 to come up with something lasting.

At the same time I understand you have grave concerns about our planet. It so happens I am in need of a new fossil fuel czar. Specifically, your title would be Chief White House Liaison for Fossil Fuel Industries, dealing with environmentally friendly corporations such as BP. It would be the kind of quiet job that would still make possible an afternoon tee time at Congressional. And funnily enough, I've been looking for someone to fill out my foursome (right now, it's me, Jon Corzine, and Creigh Deeds).

The way I see it, Joe, is that you deserve better than a Senate seat. Leave that for the old codgers like Arlen. But for you, greatness awaits. And whether it be in Waziristan, Caracas, or sailing 'round the Horn of Africa as a Commissioner on the High Seas (I know how much you loved the Navy!), I believe you can do a tremendous service for your country.

Rahm was just asking me what you are waiting for. I told him, "Joe is the one he's been waiting for."

In friendship,

Barack Obama

Barack H. Obama
President of the United States

P.S. Pick one of these jobs and I'll even throw in two free tickets to next year's White House Correspondents' Dinner.

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